Water, death, and angry ninja take the forefront in this exciting volume of the legendary *Lone Wolf and Cub* series. A pitiful ferryboat girl must watch as the Lone Wolf, Ogami Itto, stands against the man she loves. A rogue swordsman-for-hire learns a valuable lesson about Bushido, the Way of the Warrior, from Ogami's steely blade. And the Lone Wolf faces the treachery of the Kurokuwa ninja clan, taking employment as a lowly river porter in a clever plan to steal the secret plans of his arch-enemy, the Yagyu clan, declaring war against them all!

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Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

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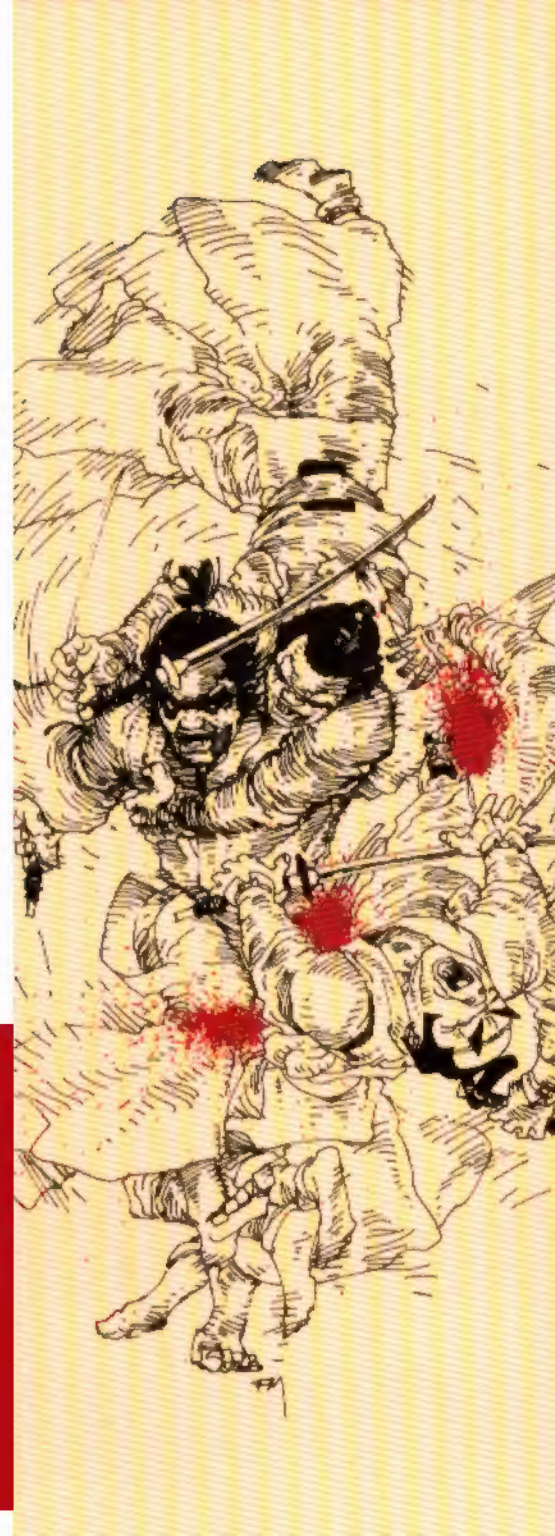
■ 2000 HARVEY AWARD WINNER

LONE WOLF AND CUB

KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

LONE WOLF AND CUB



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DARK HORSE COMICS

VOLUME 9

ECHO OF THE ASSASSIN

By KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

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DANA LEWIS

lettering & retouch
DIGITAL CHAMELEON

cover artwork
FRANK MILLER with **LYNN VARLEY**

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ECHO OF THE ASSASSIN

子連れ狼

By KAZUO KOIKE
& GOSEKI KOJIMA

VOLUME

9

A NOTE TO READERS

Lone Wolf and Cub is famous for its carefully researched re-creation of Edo-Period Japan. To preserve the flavor of the work, we have chosen to retain many Edo-Period terms that have no direct equivalents in English. Japanese is written in a mix of Chinese ideograms and a syllabic writing system, resulting in numerous synonyms. In the glossary, you may encounter words with multiple meanings. These are words written with Chinese ideograms that are pronounced the same but carry different meanings. A Japanese reader seeing the different ideograms would know instantly which meaning it is, but these synonyms can cause confusion when Japanese is spelled out in our alphabet. *O-yurushi o* (please forgive us)!

LONE WOLF AND CUB

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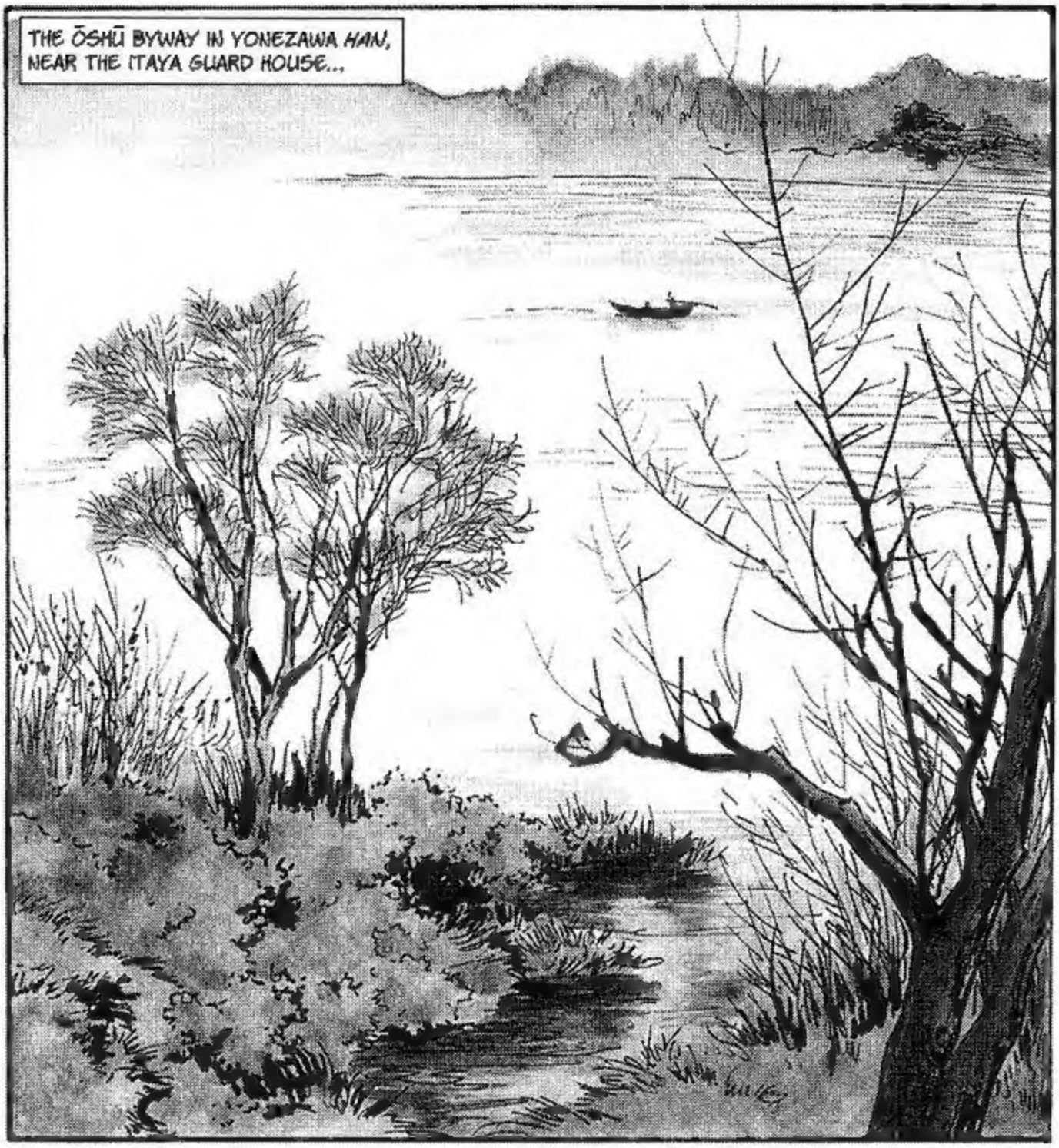
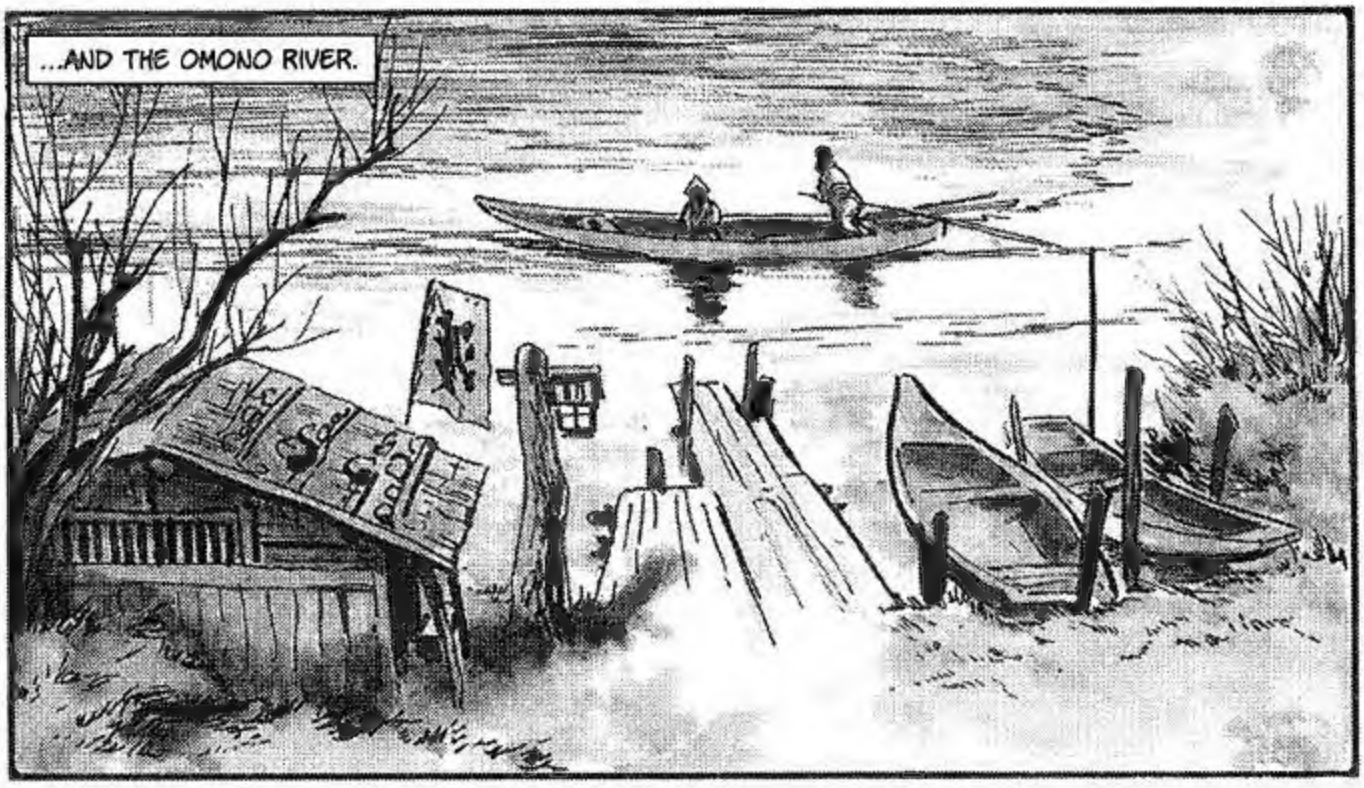
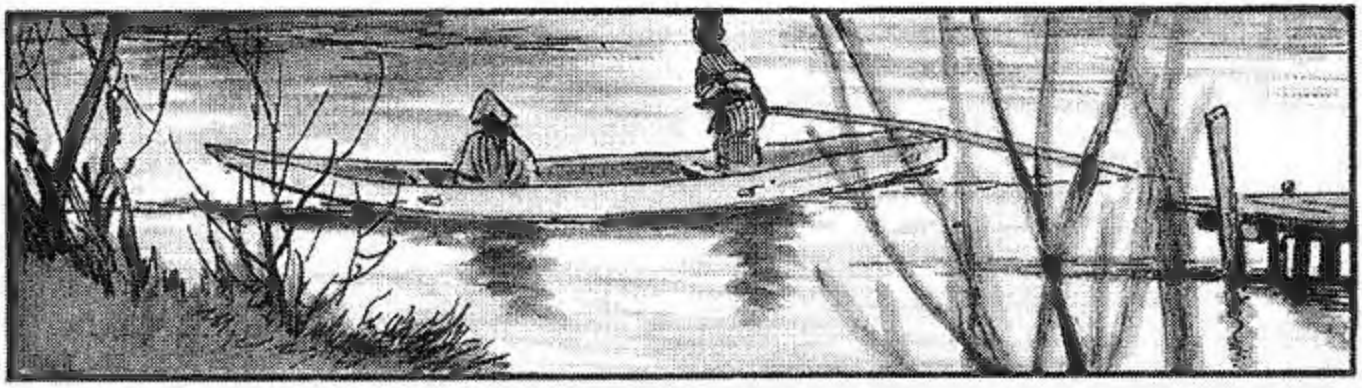
the forty-fifth

Wife of the Heart


THE ŌSHŪ BYWAY IN YONEZAWA HAN,
NEAR THE ITAYA GUARD HOUSE...


...AND THE OMONO RIVER.

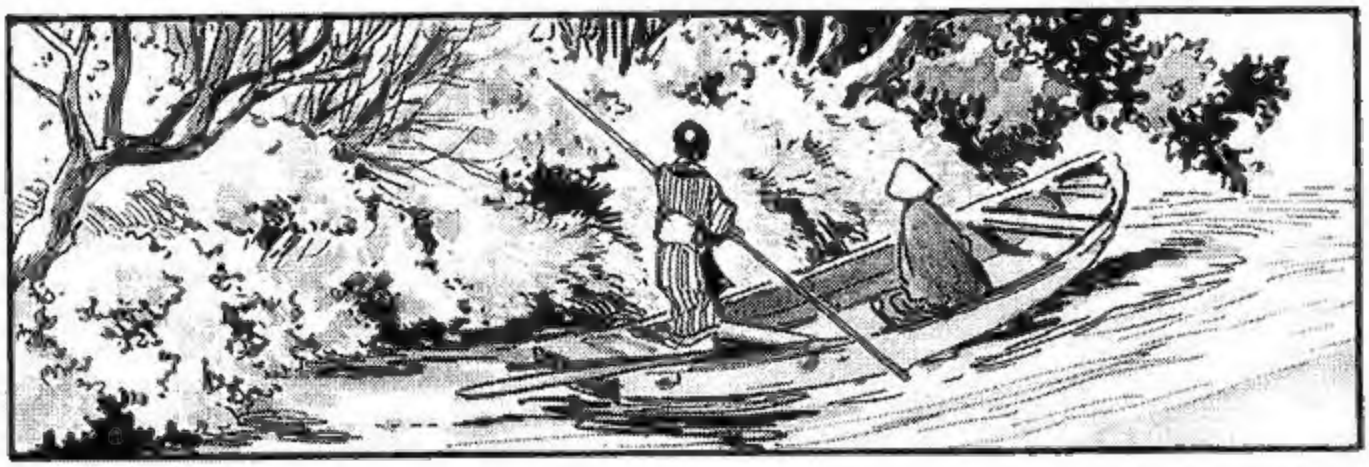


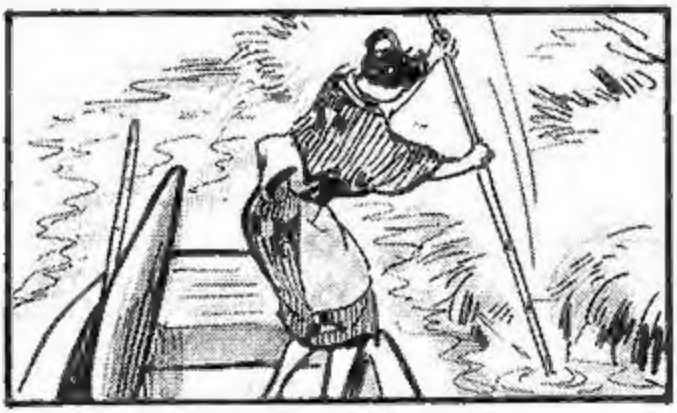
KRIIK
KRIIK

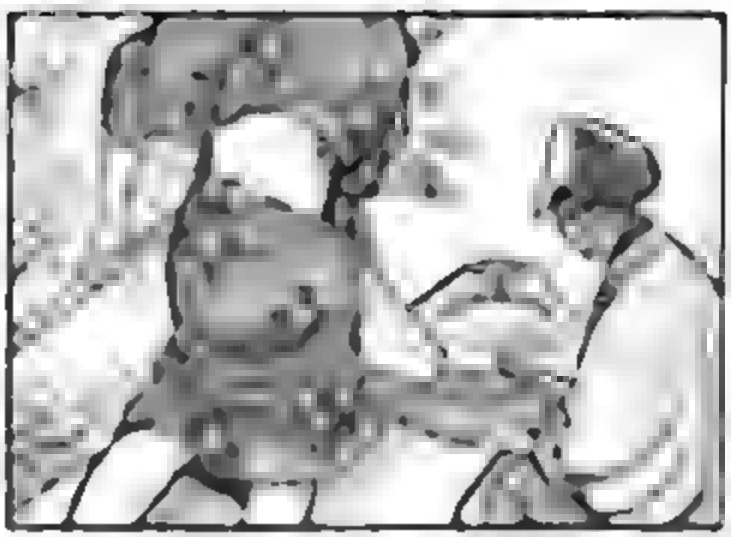
KRIIK

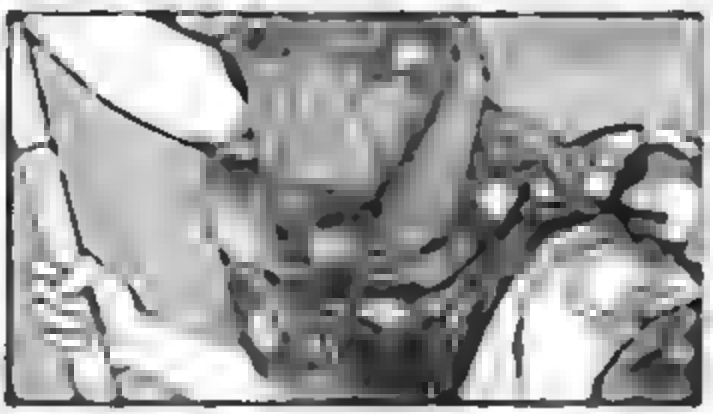
KRIIK

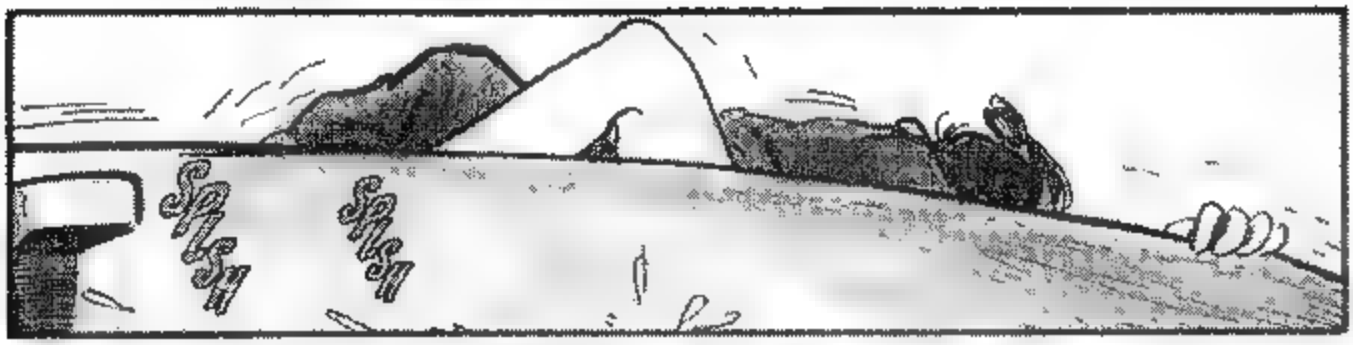
THIS IS GOOD ENOUGH!
HURRY UP!







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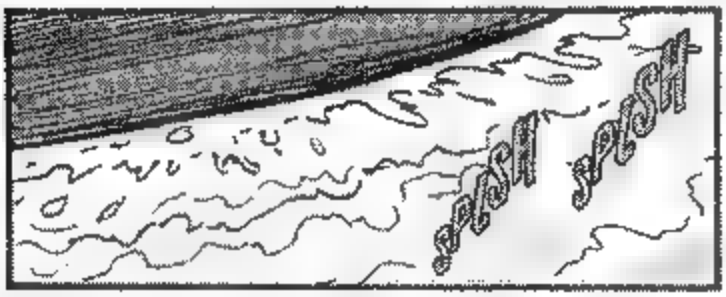
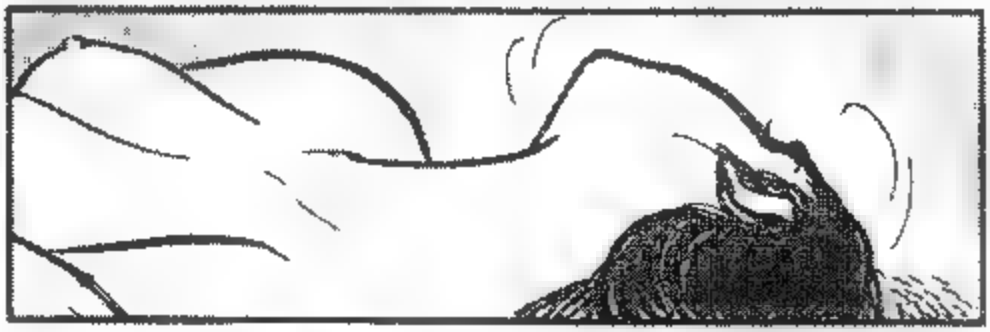
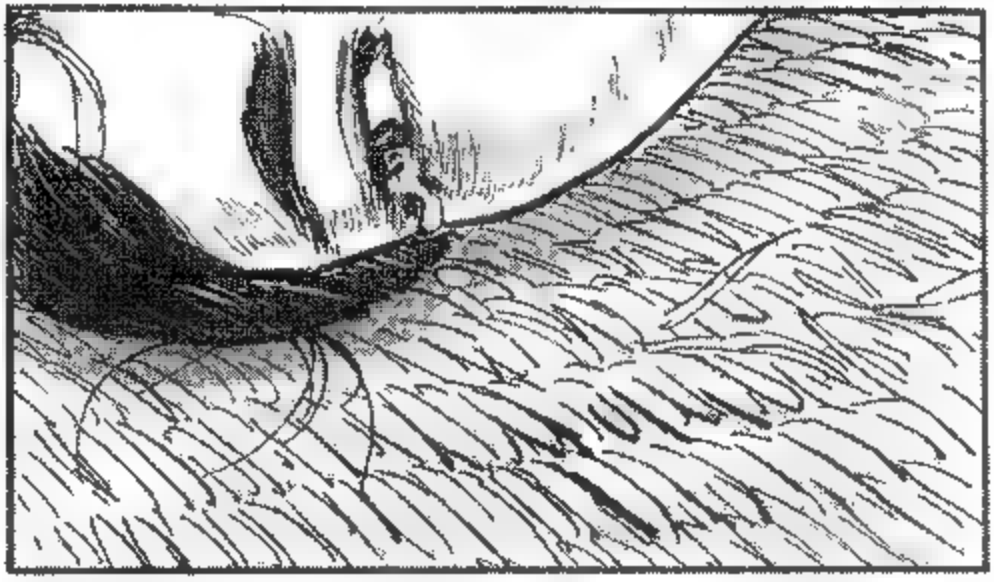
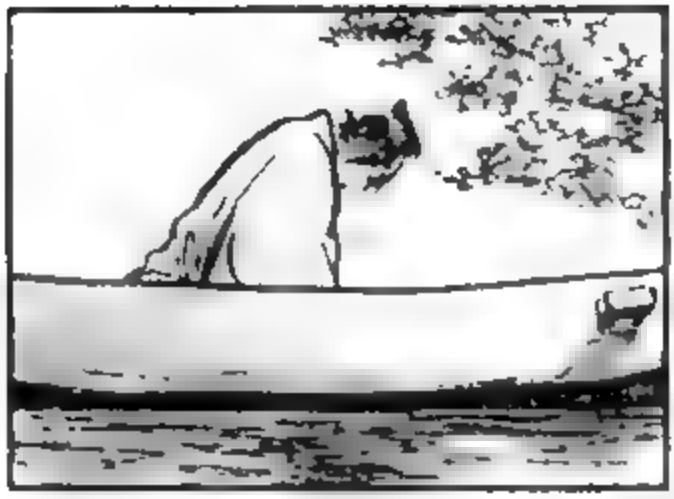
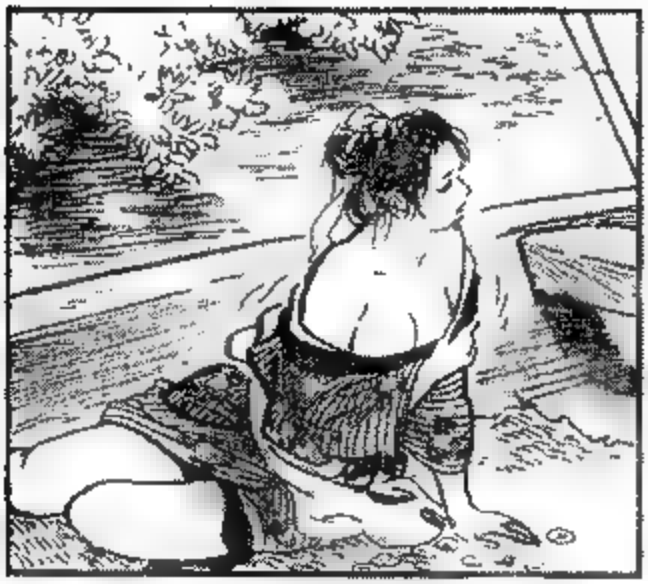

SPLSH SPLSH

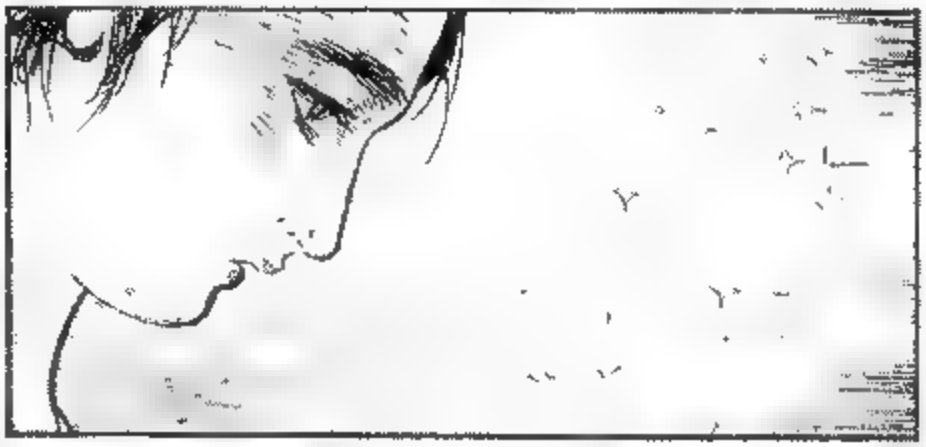
SHIFT
SHAME

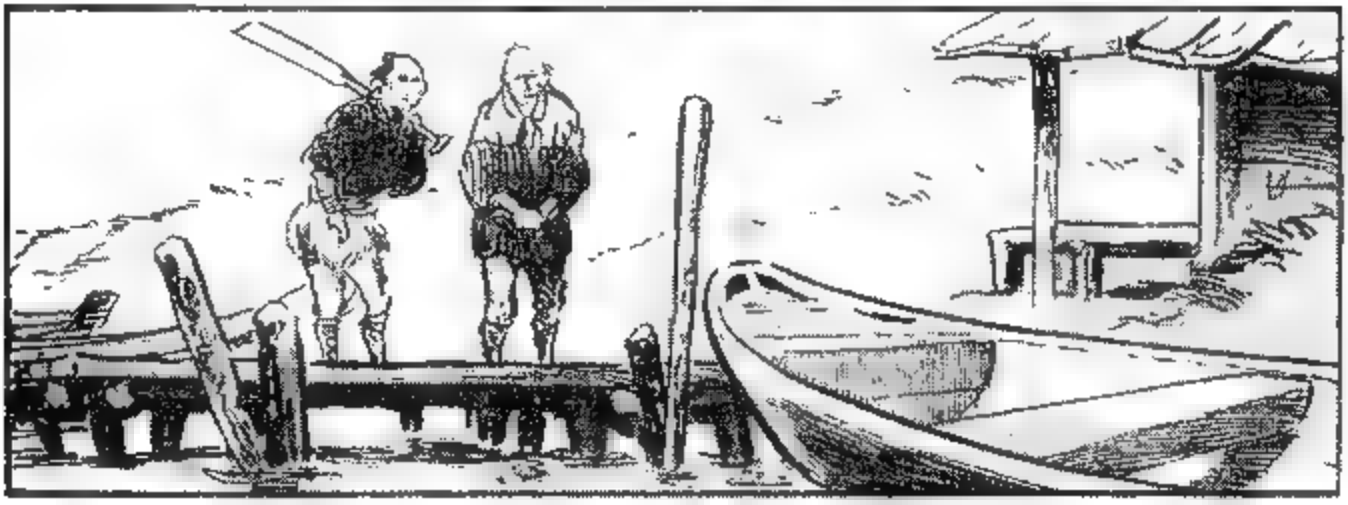






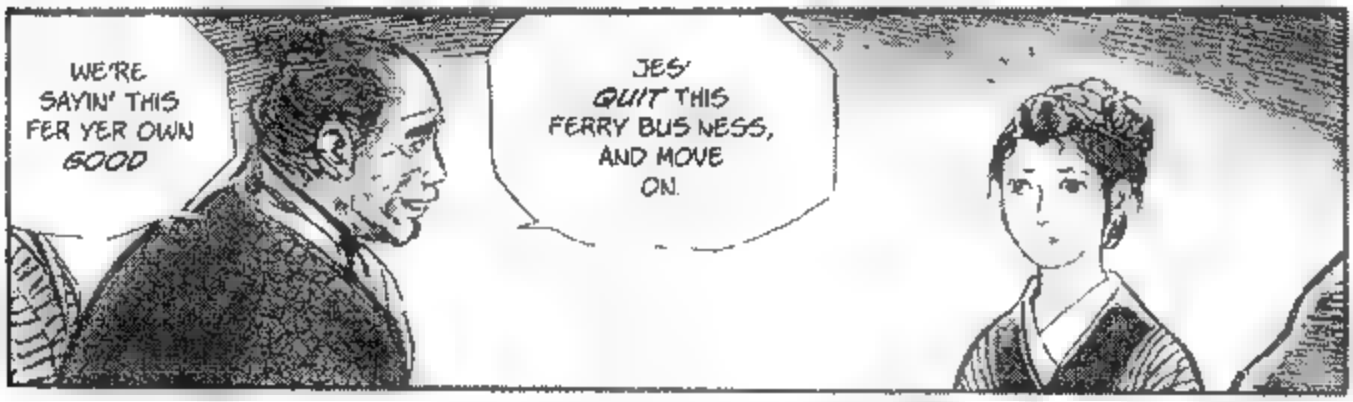






YA GOT A MINUTE?

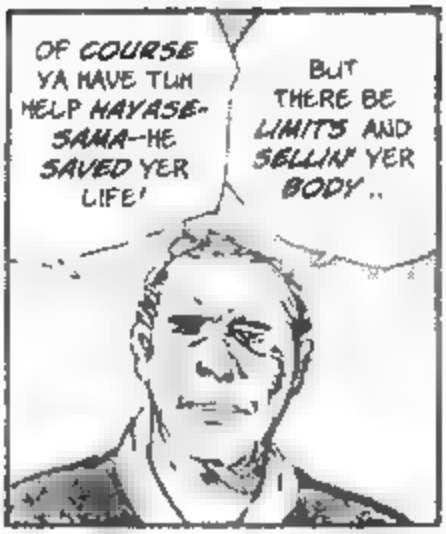
O-CHIYO, HON.


WE'RE SAYIN' THIS FER YER OWN GOOD
JES' QUIT THIS FERRY BUS NESS, AND MOVE ON.

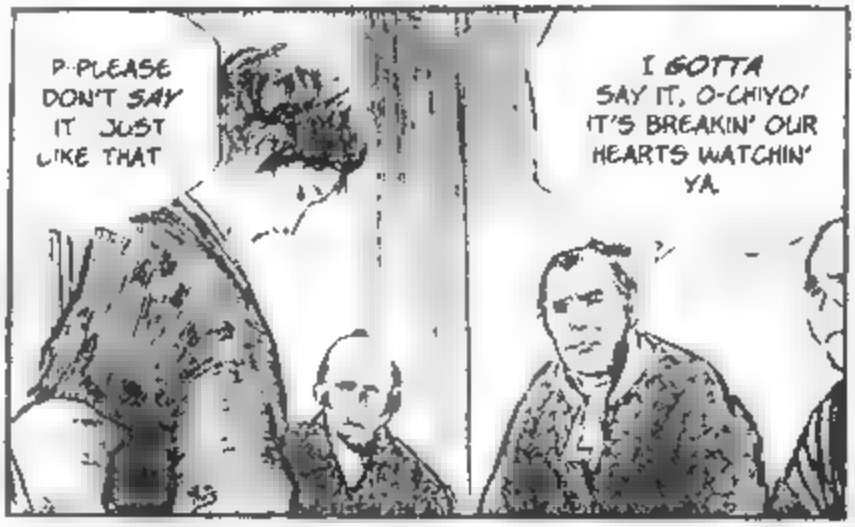
YER IN LUCK, O-CHIYO.. THE OWNER OF KADOYA UP AT THE IZAKA HOT SPRINGS NEEDS SOME-ONE TO HELP HIM IN HIS OLD AGE.
YOU COULDN'T ASK FOR NOTHING BETTER RIGHT?
....

HE SAYS HE'LL EVEN SPLIT THE RIGHTS TO THE SPRING WITH YOU.
SETTLE DOWN, HAVE A KID, HAVE A GOOD LIFE.
WE ALL KNEW YOUR PA FROM WAY BACK. AN' WE'RE WORRIED FOR YA, O-CHIYO

THE WAY THINGS IS NOW, WE COULDN'T LOOK YER OLD PA IN THE FACE.
. . . .
. . . .


OF COURSE YA HAVE TUH HELP HAYASE-SAMA—HE SAVED YER LIFE!
BUT THERE BE LIMITS AND SELLIN' YER BODY..

DON'T SAY IT! NOT THAT!

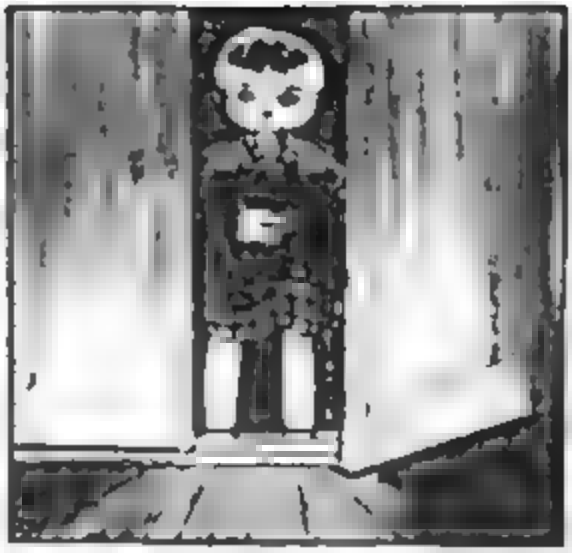

P-PLEASE DON'T SAY IT JUST LIKE THAT
I GOTTA SAY IT, O-CHIYO! IT'S BREAKIN' OUR HEARTS WATCHIN' YA.

IF HAYASE-SAMA WAS FAMILY, OR YER HUSBAND, IT MIGHT BE DIFFERENT
BUT HE AIN'T! SO WE GOTTA SPEAK OUT

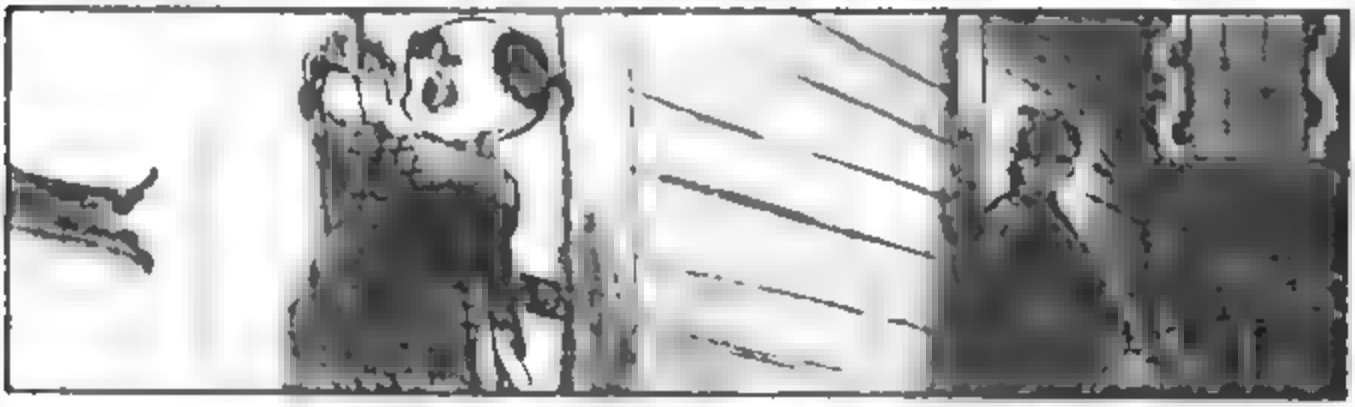
HE'S RIGHT O-CHIYO! SURE, HAYASE-SAMA SAVED YA.
BUT IT WAS THEM SAMURAI THAT WERE BAD YOU DIDN'T DO NOTHIN'!

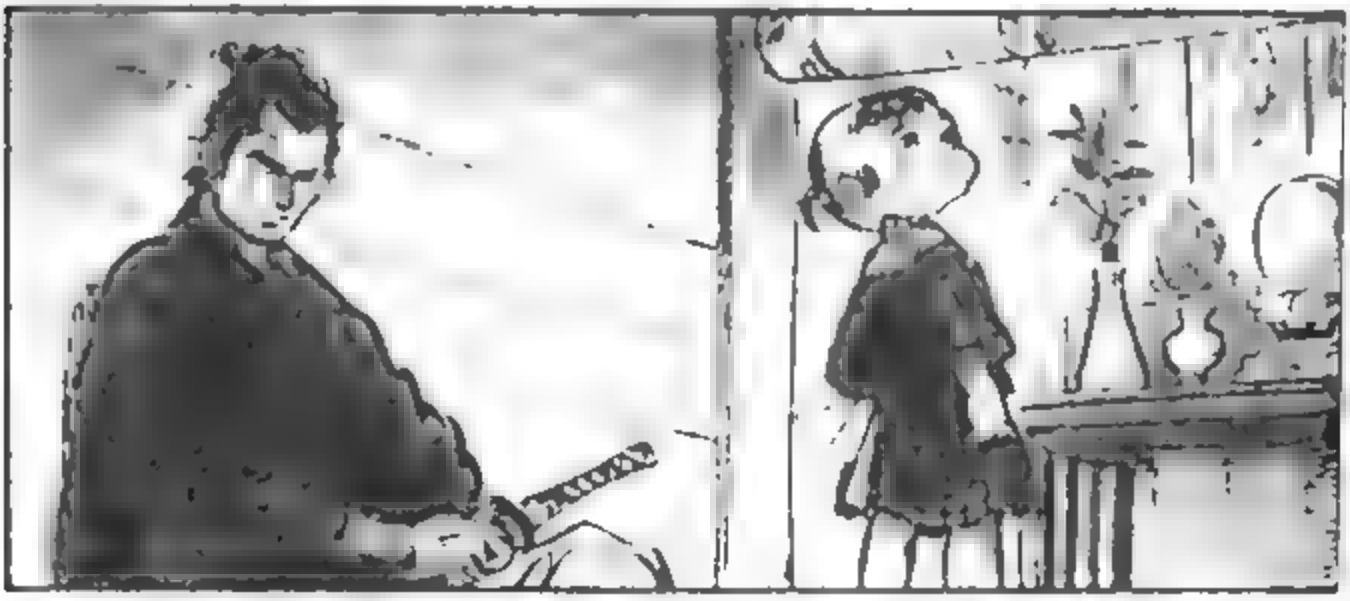
IF HAYASE-SAMA WAS GONNA GET BETTER AND MARRY YOU SOMEDAY, THAT'D CHANGE THINGS BUT HE AIN'T!

HE'S DOWN AND OUT NOW, BUT HE USED TO BE ONE OF THEM HIGH-RANKIN' SAMURAI
HIM MARRY A FERRY-BOAT GIRL?
A GIRL WHO SELLS HER BODY?
PLEASE
PLEASE DON'T
YA WANT US TO TELL HAYASE-SAMA? TELL HIM HE WOULDN'T HAVE HIS FOOD OR MEDICINE IF THIS POOR GIRL WAN'T TRADING HER VIRGINITY, HER TREASURE TO BUY 'EM?
I'D RATHER DIE
I COULDN'T LIVE!
IF HAYASE-SAMA KNEW, I COULDN'T



HUH?
WHOSE KID IS THAT?
HE'S WITH THAT ROHAN WHAT CAME IN. DON'T GIVE HIM NO NEVER MIND



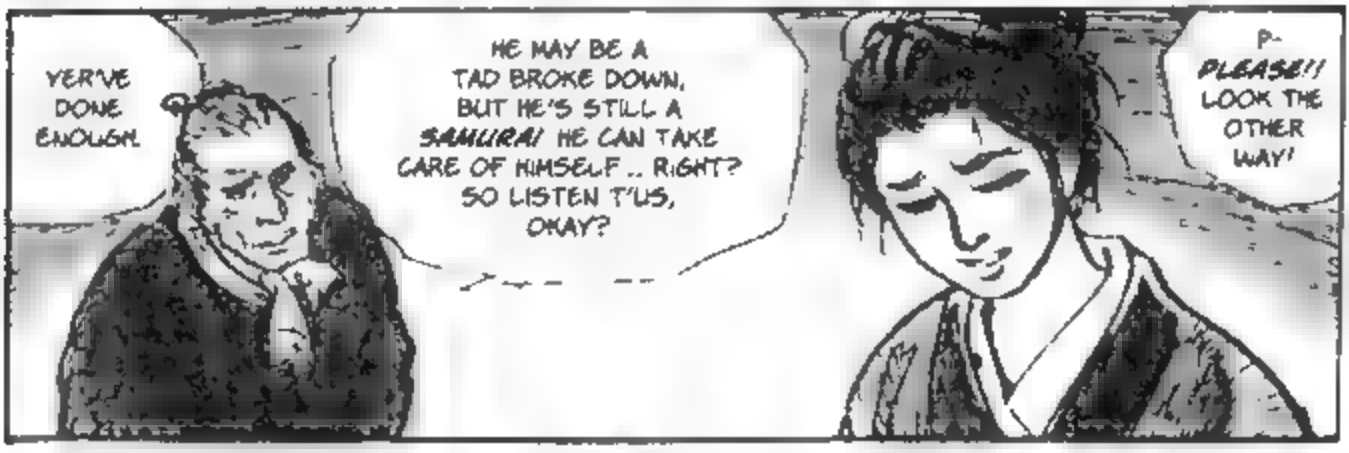


THAT'S WHY WE DON'T TELL HAYASE-SAMA. 'CUZ WE'RE AFRAID IF WE DO, SOMETHIN' TERRIBLE'LL HAPPEN!
BUT PEOPLE ARE STARTIN' TA TALK, O-CHIYO! THE WOMENFOLK CAN'T KEEP THEIR YAPS SHUT
ARE SAYING IT'S THE SHAME OF THE ONONO RIVER. A STAIN ON ALL US BOATMEN. IT'S GETTIN' OUTTA

AND NOW ALL THEM YOUNG BLOODS, EVEN SAMURAI, COMIN' HERE LOOKING FOR YA!

AT THIS RATE THERE'S GONNA BE A BLOWUP, CLEAR AS
RUMORS ARE FLYIN', GIRL. AND WITH ALL THEM YOUNG FELLERS COMIN' TO RIDE O-CHIYO'S
ONE DAY IT'LL BE FISTS AND SWORDS FLYING! OVER

AND THEN IT'LL BE TOO LATE, UNDERSTAND? HAYASE-SAMA'LL HEAR ABOUT IT FROM SOMEONE
AND THEN EVERYTHING YOU'VE DONE FOR HIM, PAYIN' IN BLOOD TO HELP HIM
IT'LL ALL BE FOR NAUGHT!
LOOK'EE WE'RE NOT BLAMIN' YOU, O-CHIYO BUT JEST FORGET HAYASE-SAMA, AND GET YERSELF TO IIZAKA


YER'VE DONE ENOUGH
HE MAY BE A TAD BROKE DOWN, BUT HE'S STILL A SAMURAI! HE CAN TAKE CARE OF HIMSELF... RIGHT? SO LISTEN T'US, OKAY?
P-PLEASE!! LOOK THE OTHER WAY!

JUST, JUST A LITTLE LONGER! I WON'T CAUSE YOU ANY MORE GRIEF, I PROMISE BUT... JUST ONE MORE MONTH

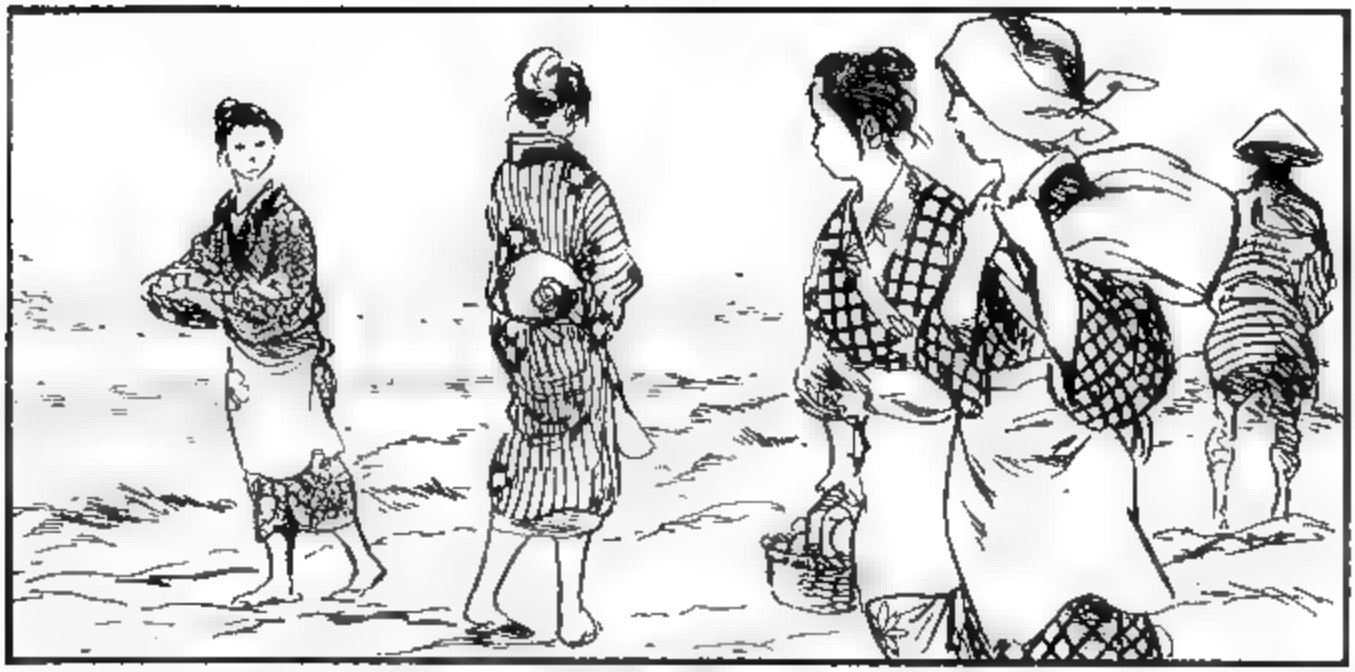
I BEG YOU!

MY HUSBAND SWEATED TO CATCH THESE CARP!
AND I HAIN'T SELLIN' 'EM TO NO WHORE!

MAYBE YOU THINK YOU CAN FATTEN UP ON 'EM AND CATCH MORE OF OUR MENFOLK! HMPH!
WELL, NOT MY MAN, YOU DON'T!

NOW YOU GIT!

I I'D LIKE–
DON'T YOU EVEN TOUCH 'EM!



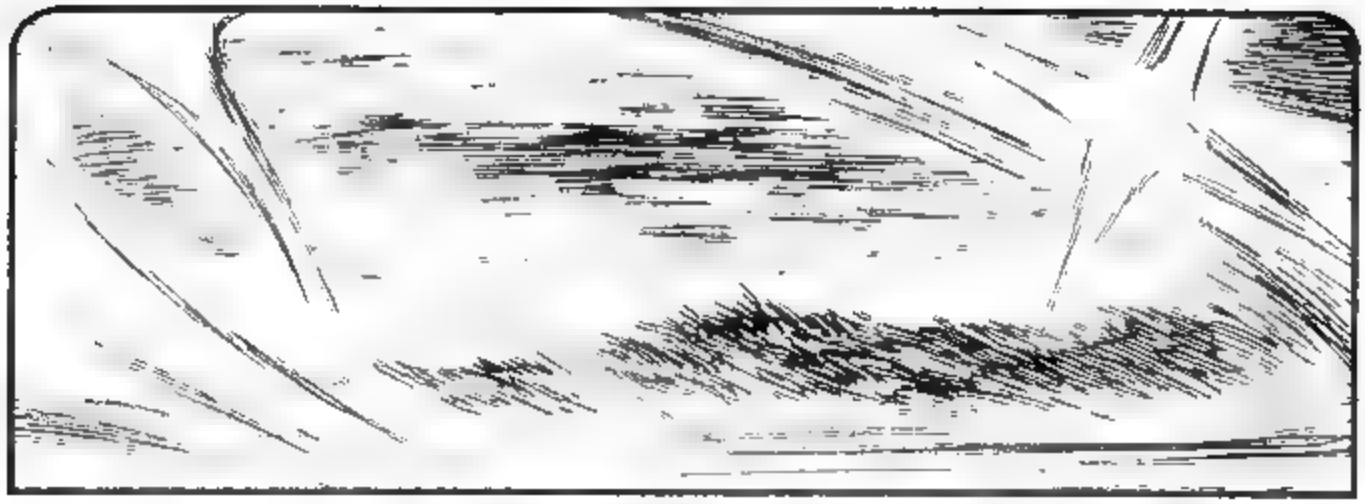
AHH...!!
Snff:
:hnnk

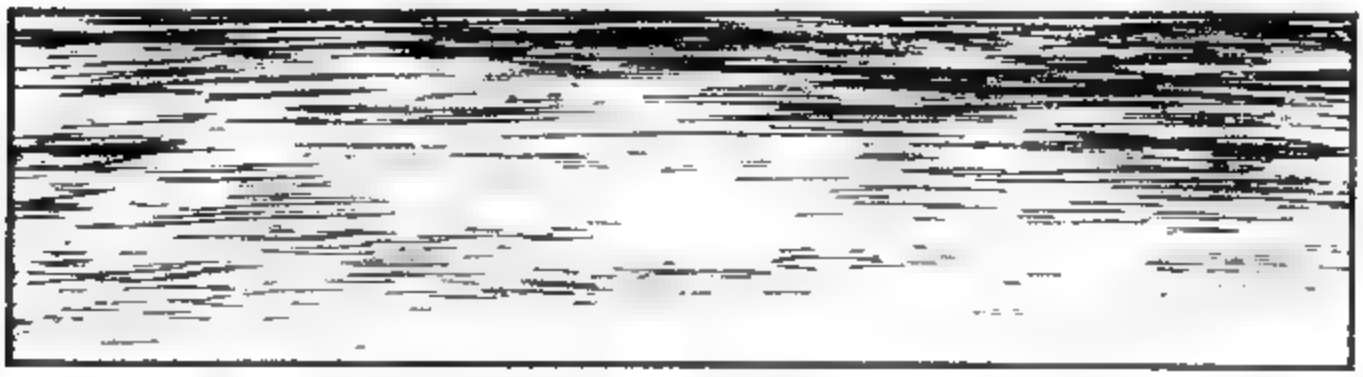
THEM MEAN BITCHES' LORDY.

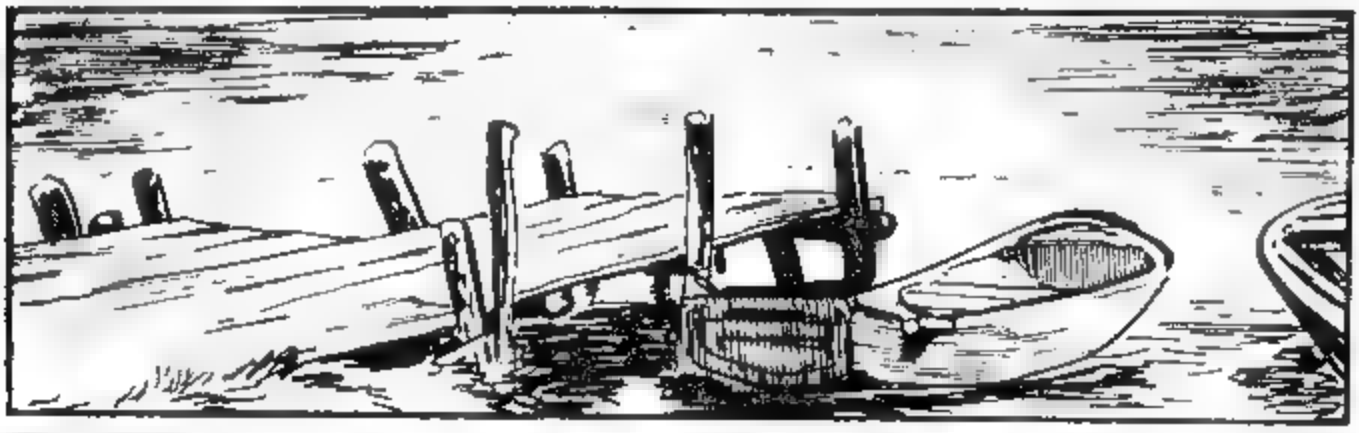
HERE YOU K.N HAVE 'EM JES' DON'T YA CRY
....

'KAY

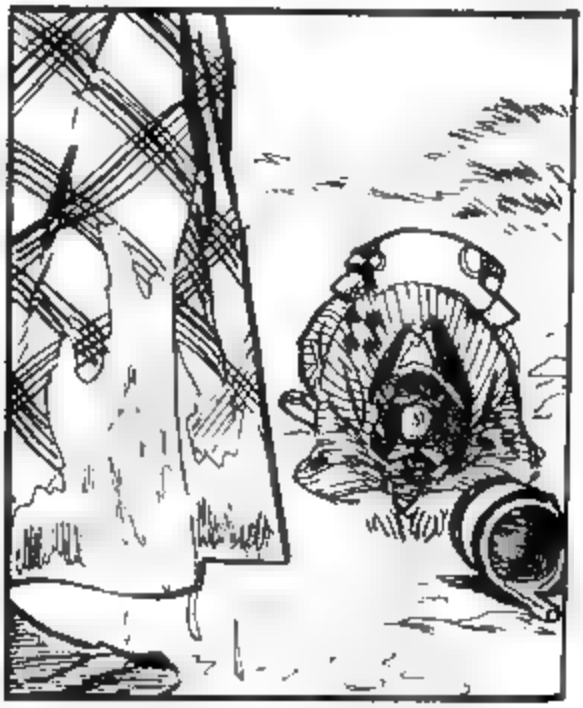
AN' IN EXCHANGE
AH?!







INSOLENT WENCH!



INTOL-
ERABLE!

YOU
SHALL PAY
FOR THIS!
OH!
OH!!

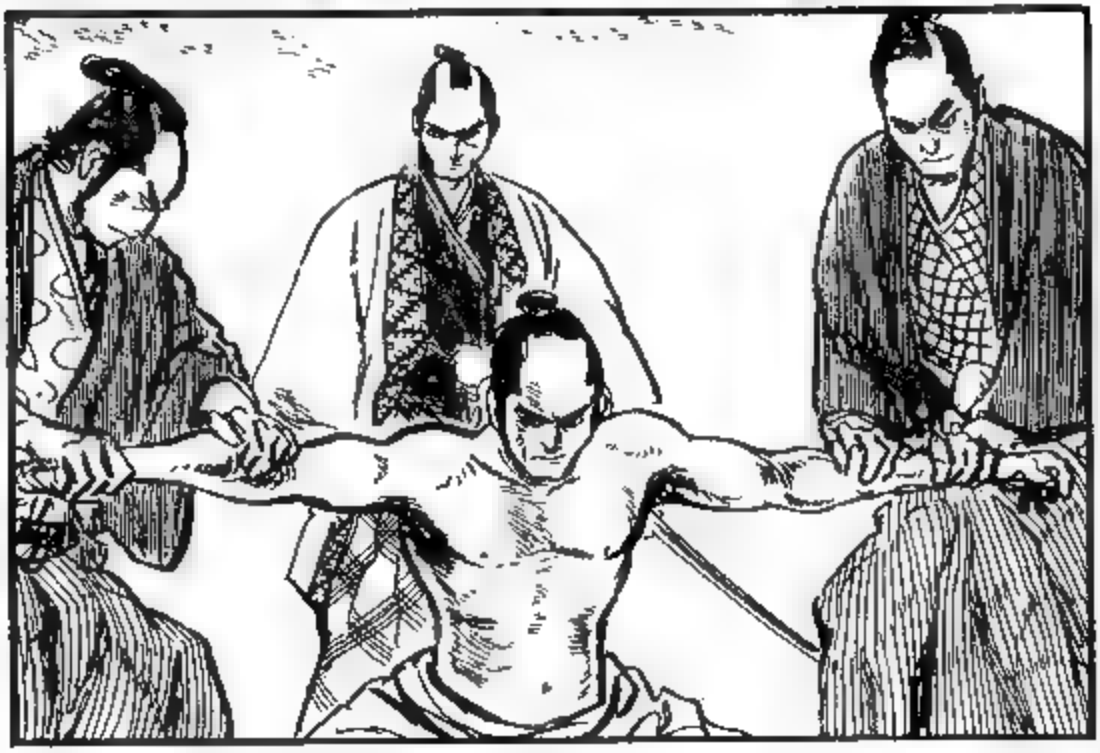
HYAA!
EEK!
HOLD!
HOLD, MY LORD!
DAIGAKU-SAMA! PLEASE STAY YOUR HAND!
YOU DARE INTER-FERE?!
SHE BORE YOU NO ILL, MY LORD. PLEASE, OVERLOOK HER SIMPLE CARELESSNESS

NEVER! NOW MOVE!
MY LORD! IF SHE HAS ERRED, IT REFLECTS UPON MYSELF AND THE ITAYA GUARD HOUSE I COMMAND—IT IS I WHO SHOULD BE PUNISHED!

HUH! WELL SAID, HAYASE.
HEH HEH HEH.. IF SHE'S SO WORTH PROTECTING..

.THEN YOU MUST BE WILLING TO TAKE HER PLACE, YES?!
I AM!

HOW INTERESTING! VERY WELL— STRIP HIM!



SHRAKKK

KRAKK
FWAKK

SHRAKK

KRAKK

SHRAKK
SHRAKK

FWAKK

KRAKK

SKRAKK

FWAKK

SHRAKK

FWAKK
SHAKK
KRAKK
KRAKK

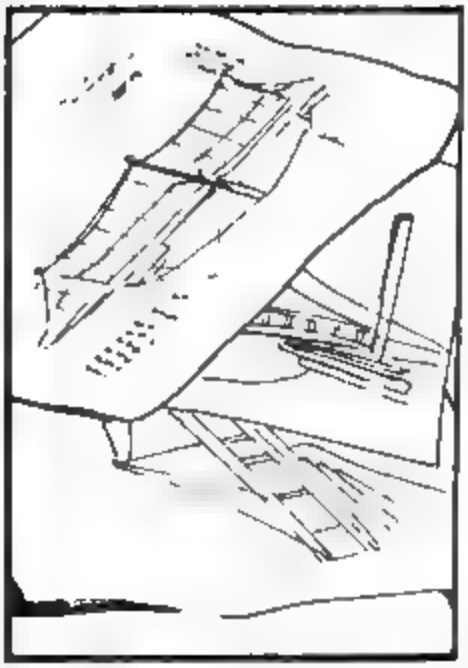
AHH!! O-SAMURAI-SAMA !
OH, OH! NOOO!

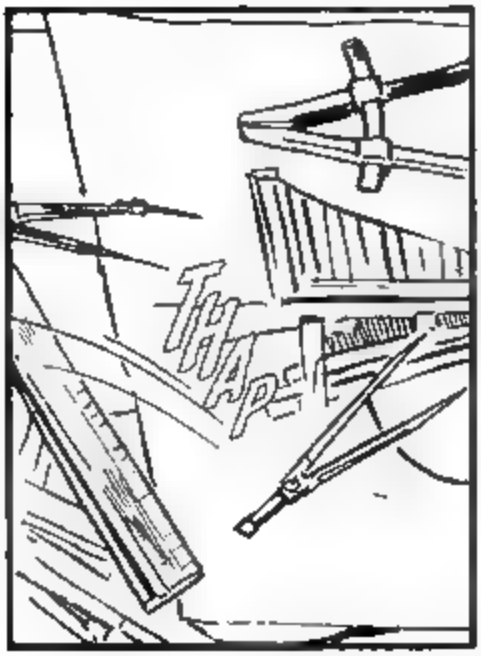
HUH! TOUGH BASTARD!
shahh
shahh

FWAP

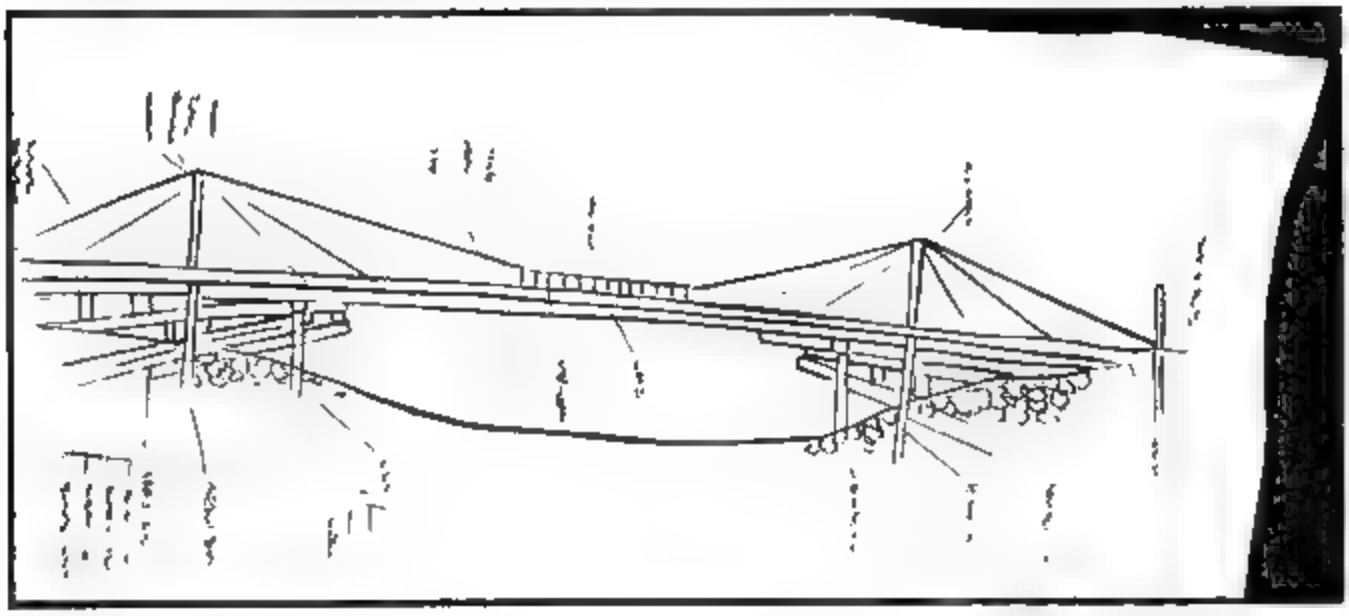
O-SAMURAI-SAMA!
I I OH

WH-WHAT CAN I DO?!
:Sniff:




THAPP

DONE! AT LAST!!



OH ?

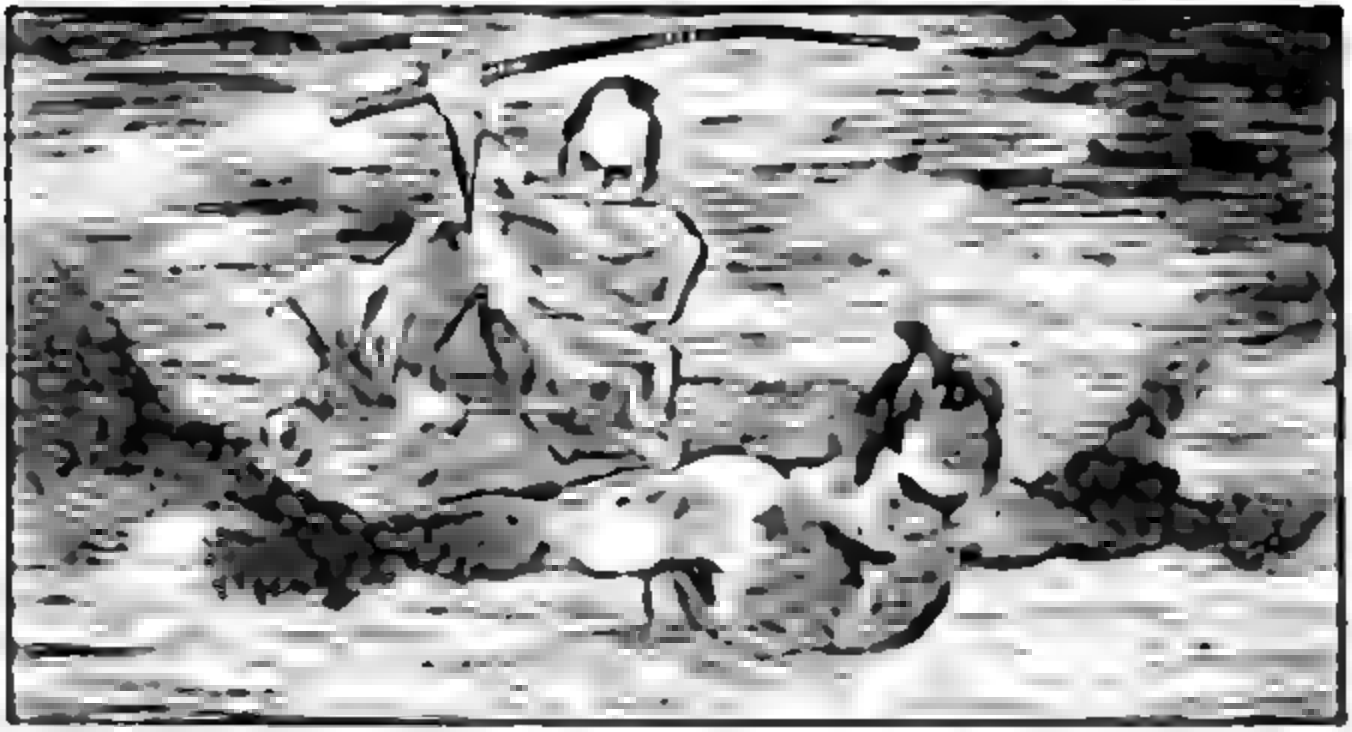
ARE YOU STILL AT WORK?!
F YOU DON'T GET YOUR REST
DON'T WORRY! NOW THAT SPRING'S HERE, MY WHOLE BODY FEELS LIGHTER.

IN ANY CASE, CHIYO—I'VE DONE IT!
FINALLY!

LOOK! THIS WILL WORK! I KNOW IT!
YES FINISHED AT LAST
GOOD NESS!

YOU KNOW IT'S BEEN THE DREAM OF THE HAYASE FAMILY TO BRIDGE THE OMONO, EVER SINCE WE WERE ENTRUSTED WITH THE RIVER GUARD HOUSE...

MY FATHER POURED HIS L FE INTO IT, AND I'VE KEPT THE FAITH. IT'S ALL I'VE LIVED FOR.



OUR OLD LORD SUPPORTED THE IDEA OF A BRIDGE. BUT WHEN HE PASSED, AND HIS SON DAIGAKU-*SAMA* CAME.

I EARNED HIS WRATH, AND WAS REMOVED FROM MY POST

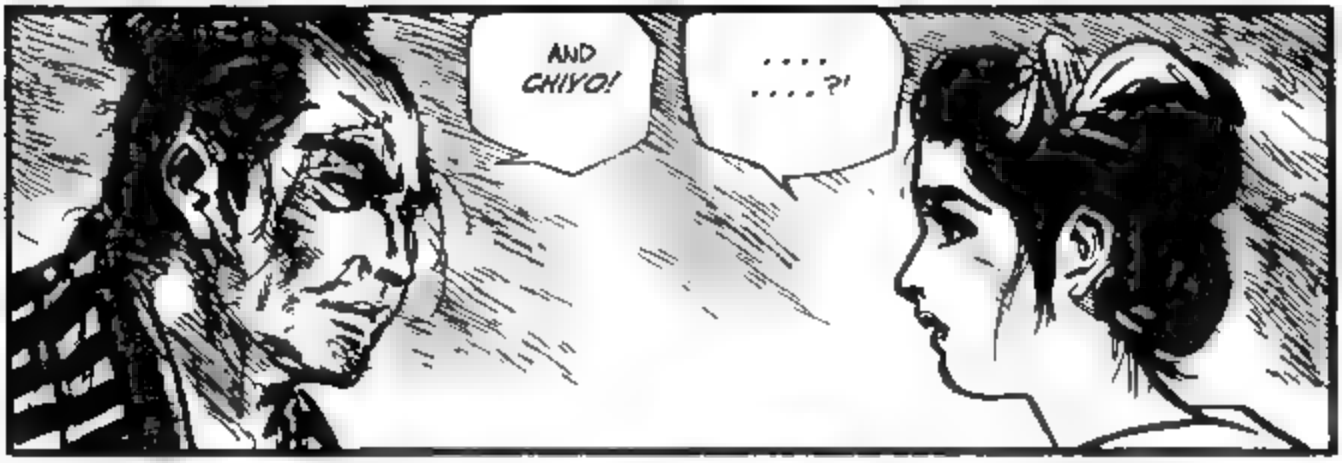
AND NOW, THIS BODY CAN NEVER SERVE AGAIN.
IT IT'S ALL *MY* FAULT!

ALL BECAUSE YOU HELPED ME.
BUT, CHIYO
IT WAS ALL FOR THE BEST!

EH?

I'VE BEEN ABLE TO CONCENTRATE *COMPLETELY* ON DESIGNING THE BRIDGE! IF I STILL HAD OFFICIAL DUTIES, I COULD *NEVER* HAVE DONE IT!
BUT BUT.. THE *INJURIES* YOU GOT IN MY PLACE. YOUR *ILLNESS* .

OUR TIME ON EARTH IS *LIMITED*, CHIYO. THERE'S NO GREATER HAPPINESS THAN TO KNOW YOU'VE USED THAT FLEETING CHANCE TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE.


AND CHIYO!
....
....?!

I OWE IT ALL TO YOU!
THAT I COULD FINISH THESE PLANS... THAT I COULD LIVE THIS LONG..

I I ONLY

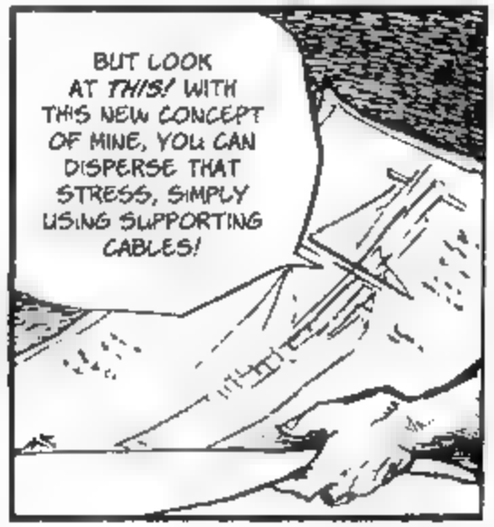
PEOPLE SAID IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO BRIDGE THE OMONO! IMPOSSIBLE!
THEY SAID IT WAS TOO WIDE! AND LIKE ITS NAME, A DEMON OF A RIVER

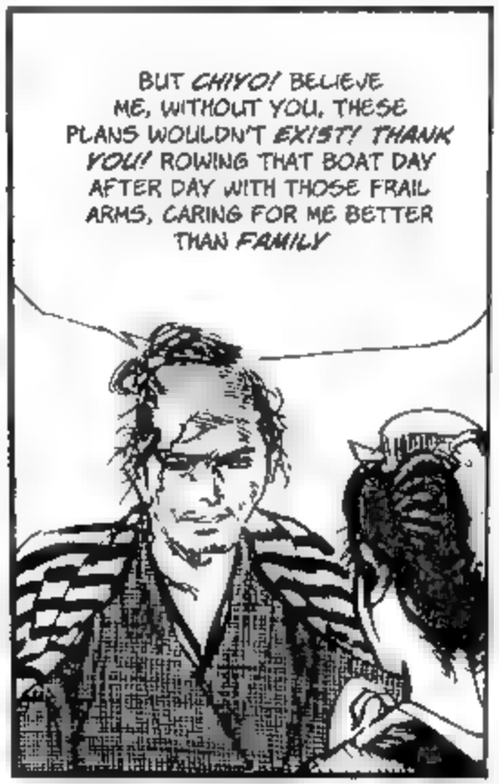
WHEN THE SNOWS MELT AND THE OMONO FLOODS, NOT A BRIDGE PILING MADE BY MAN COULD STAND AGAINST IT!

BUT WE *HAVE* TO BRIDGE IT! FOR YONEZAWA *HAN* AND ITS *PEOPLE!*

WITH A *BRIDGE*, TRADE WITH EDO WILL FLOURISH! THE *HAN* AND THE PEOPLE WILL *PROSPER!*

AND NO ONE EVER AGAIN WILL HAVE TO *DIE* CROSSING IT, LIKE YOUR POOR FATHER



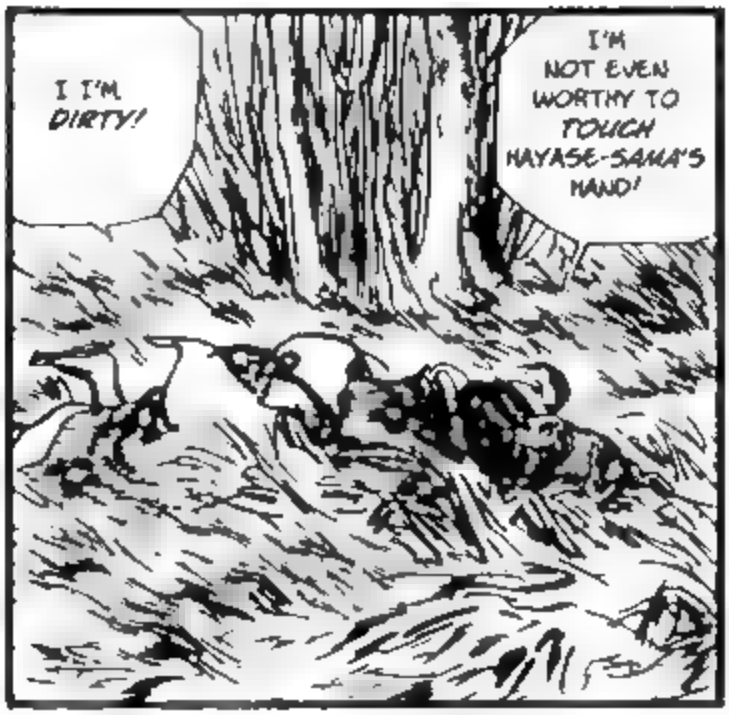


WITH THESE PLANS, ANYONE CAN BUILD MY BRIDGE! I'LL BEG HIM TO BUILD IT, EVEN IF IT COSTS ME MY LIFE! SURELY HE'LL UNDERSTAND!

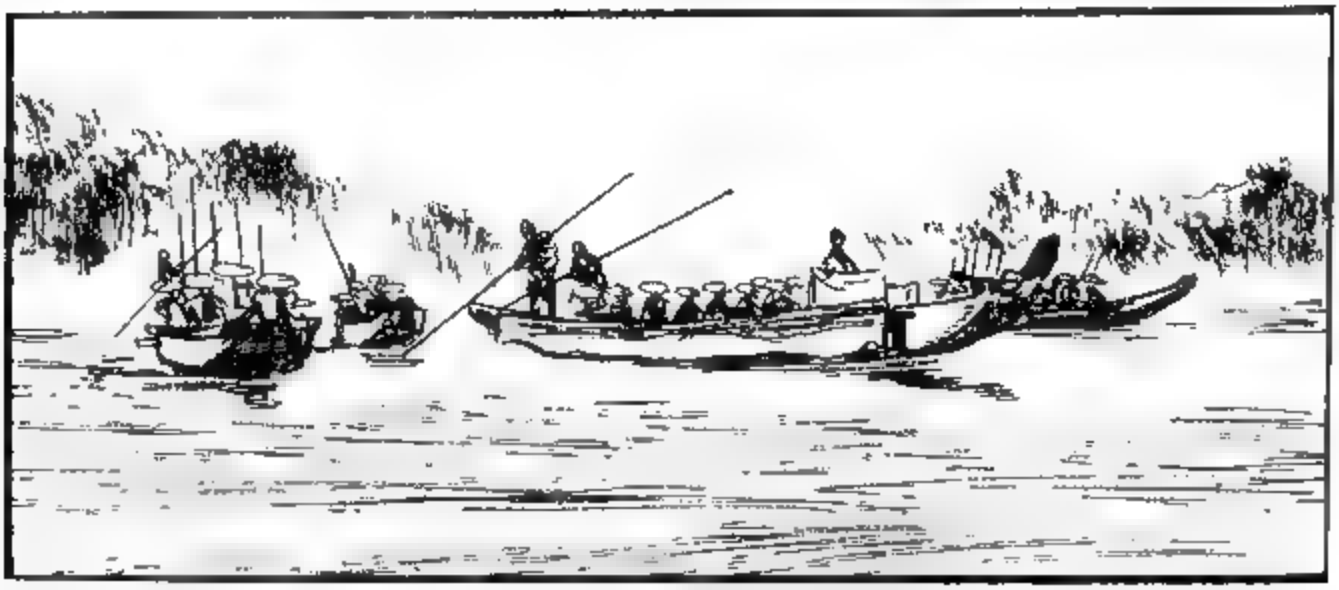
THAT'S ALL I WANT, AND I WILL BE HAPPY! AND SO, CHIYO, I WANT YOU TO FIND A WOMAN'S OWN HAPPINESS
H HOW..?! I JUST WANT TO...TO BE BY YOUR SIDE!

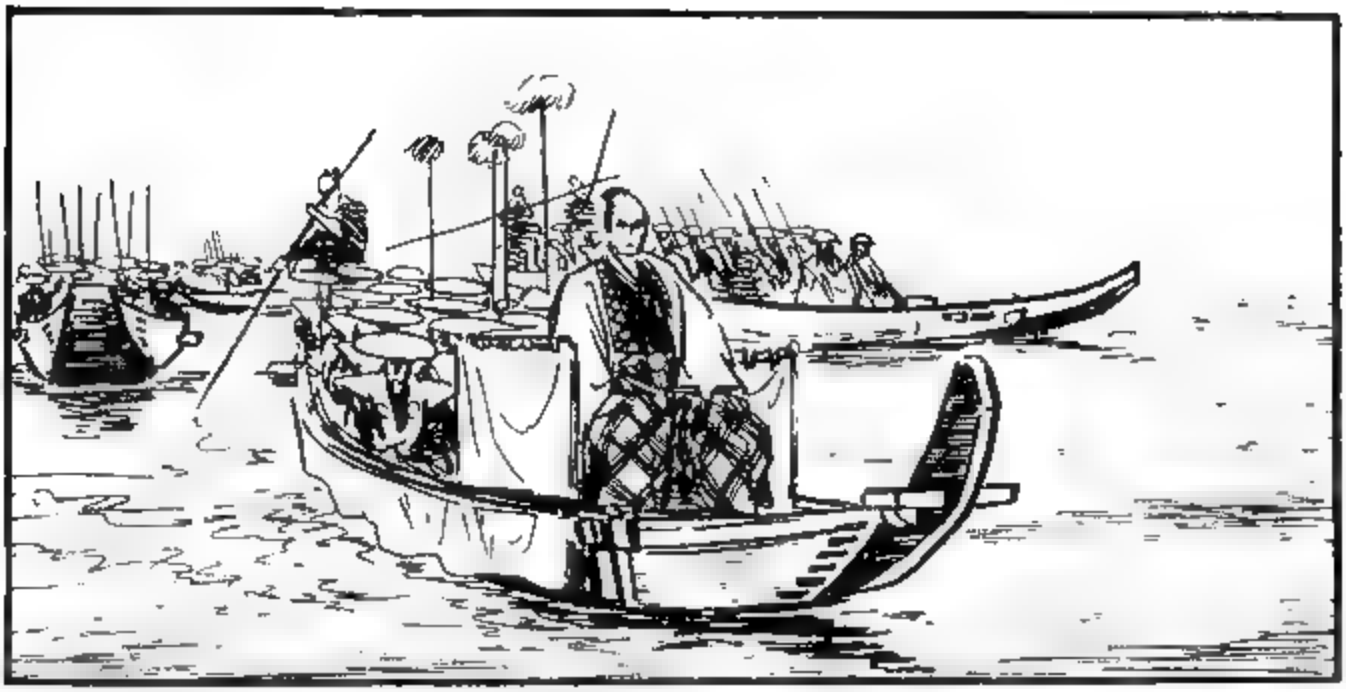
....
....
IF IF HAYASE-SAMA DOESN'T WANT ME
I CAN'T LIVE!
CHIYO!

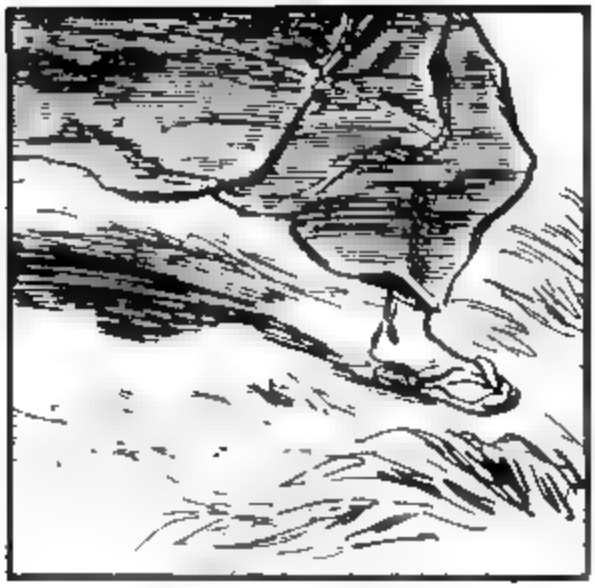
DO DO YOU LOVE-


I I'M DIRTY!
I'M NOT EVEN WORTHY TO TOUCH HAYASE-SAMA'S HAND!

AHH
JUST LET ME BE NEAR YOU. JUST THAT IS ENOUGH.







DAIGAKU-SAMA!! I CRAVE AN AUDIENCE!

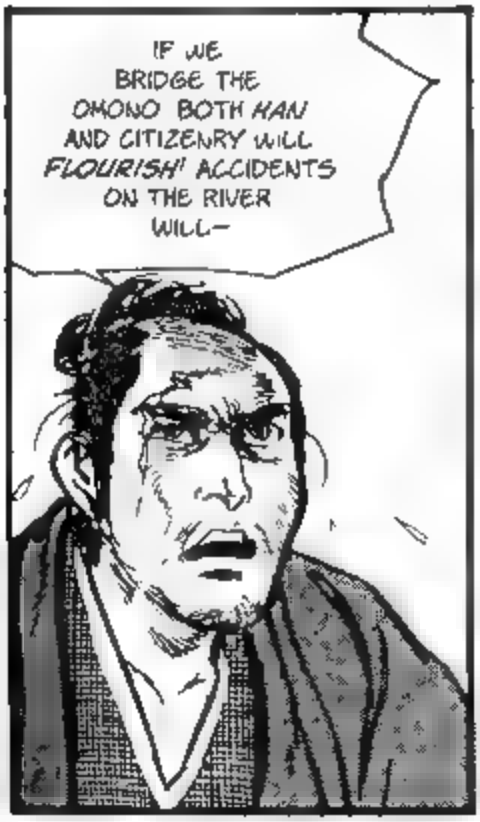
YOU CUR!
WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE!
GET BACK!
WAIT! ISN'T THAT-HAYASE?!

MY LORD! A HUMBLE REQUEST!

I AM YOUR SERVANT HAYASE TŌGO, WHO DID OFFEND YOU THESE TWO YEARS PAST!
HRNF! I REMEMBER THAT FACE!

MY LORD I HAVE DEVISED A BRIDGE THAT CAN CROSS THE OMONO RIVER! I BEG YOU, MY LORD—PLEASE VIEW THESE PLANS.

ENOUGH! BEGONE!
I SAID I DIDN'T WANT TO SEE YOUR FACE AGAIN!
MY-MY LORD!


IF WE BRIDGE THE OMONO BOTH HAN AND CITIZENRY WILL FLOURISH! ACCIDENTS ON THE RIVER WILL—

HMPH! YOU AND YOUR BRIDGES BORE ME!
GO AWAY!
MY LORD! I BEG YOU!

SILENCE!

GET OUT OF HERE!
NNG!
THUD

WE SHOULD CUT YOU IN TWO ON THE SPOT!
BUT IT WOULD FOUL OUR SWORDS TO KILL A DOG LIKE YOU!

A D-DOG?! HOW DARE YOU!

YOU DARE TALK OF BRIDGES WHILE YOU LIVE IN SHAME WITH A FERRYBOAT GIRL?
HEH! KEPT BY A WOMAN.

WHO SELLS HER-
HRRK!

:gʳnK:

WHO ARE YOU?!
BASTARD!
INTRUDER!
IDENTIFY YOURSELF!

ASSASSIN!
LONE WOLF AND CUB!

I COME FOR YOUR LIFE!
NO!! KILL HIM! KILL!

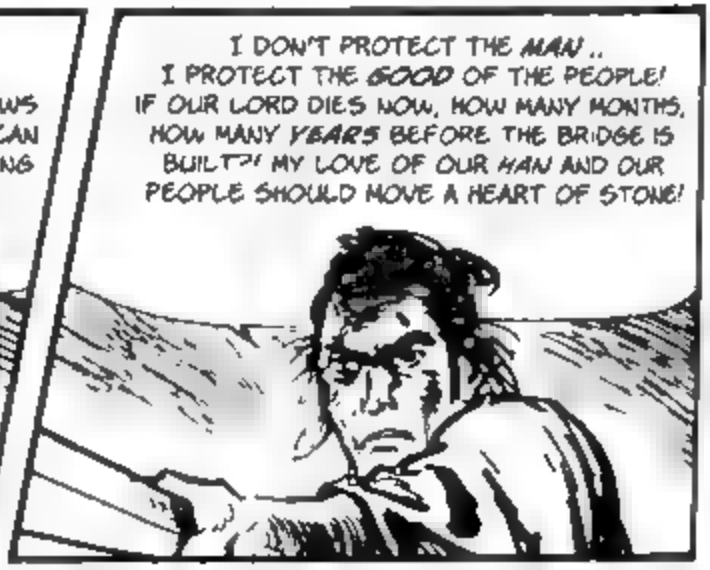
HYAA!
RYAHH!
SKRRSSH
UGH
SKSSH
SHUKKK
AGHK!
GUHH

AA!
AIIEE!
SOMEBODY! HELP ME!!

HALT!

WHY DO YOU PROTECT HIM?
IT TAKES MORE THAN A HANDFUL OF DRAWINGS TO BRIDGE THE OHONO! ONLY ONE MAN CAN MUSTER THE RESOURCES— THE LORD OF OUR HAN!

YOUR BRIDGE HAS BEEN REFUSED!
A BUSHI SHOULD DIE FOR A MASTER WHO KNOWS WISDOM. NO GOOD CAN COME OF PROTECTING A FOOL. NOW— STAND BACK!


I DON'T PROTECT THE MAN .. I PROTECT THE GOOD OF THE PEOPLE! IF OUR LORD DIES NOW, HOW MANY MONTHS, HOW MANY YEARS BEFORE THE BRIDGE IS BUILT?! MY LOVE OF OUR HAN AND OUR PEOPLE SHOULD MOVE A HEART OF STONE!

YES HE'S TURNED ME DOWN. BUT IF I LAY DOWN MY LIFE FOR HIM, EVEN DAIGAKU-SAMA WILL UNDERSTAND
NO HE WILL NOT LISTEN, NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO!

W- WHY...?!

SUCH IS THE WORLD OF THE SAMURAI, THE HARSH, FOOLISH WAY OF BUSHIDÔ!
IF YOU PURSUE THIS DREAM, A DAY WILL COME WHEN YOU MUST KILL THAT WOMAN!

I I DON'T UNDER-STAND! SPEAK CLEARLY!

BIDE YOUR TIME

LIVE TOGETHER, HEAL BOTH YOUR WOUNDS TOGETHER. LIVE FOR YOUR BRIDGE!
....

NOW— STAND BACK!
NEVER!

AN ASSASSIN, ARE YOU?! THEN KILL ME!
BY SAVING DAIGAKU-SAMA I SHALL PROVE MY WILL!
....

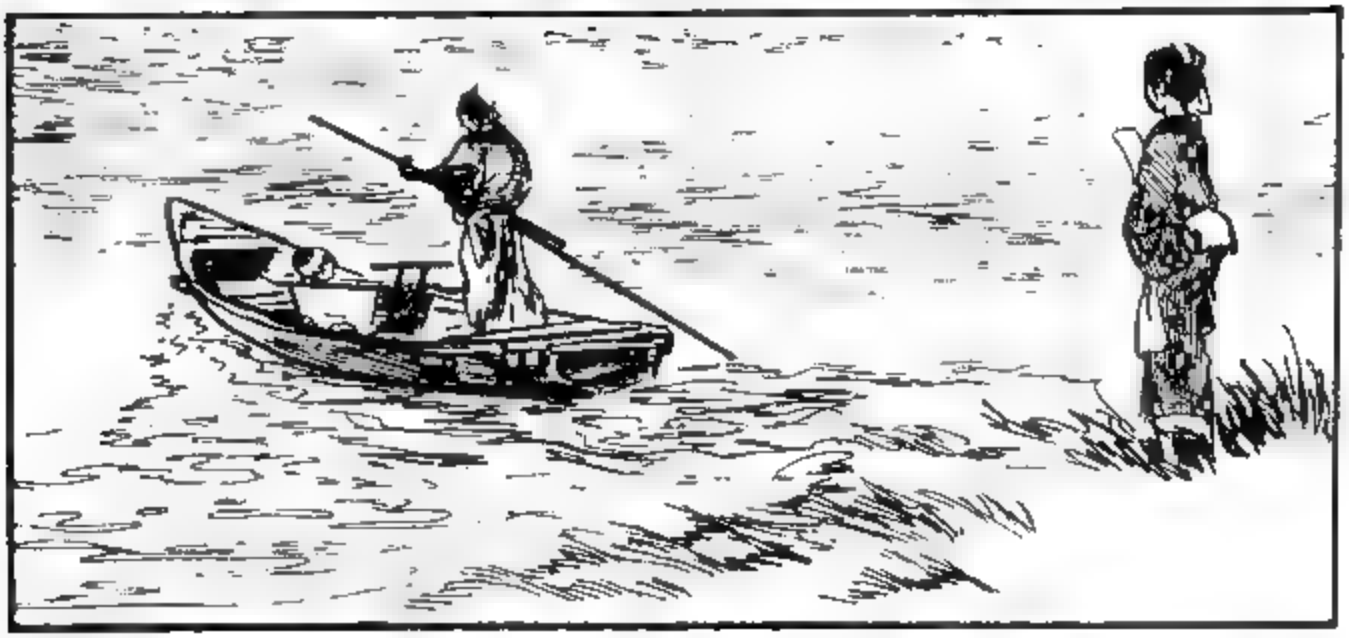
HYAA!

SKUSSH

AHH!

THUK
HRGHK!
gkk
....

EVEN WITHOUT KNOWING ALL, HIS LIFE WOULD HAVE SEEMED AN ENDLESS HELL.
YET IF THERE ARE *PLANS*, HIS BRIDGE *WILL* BE BUILT HIS HEART AND SOUL FILL THESE PAGES. YOU MUST *LIVE*, AND FULFILL YOUR HUSBAND'S DREAM..
.FOR YOU ARE HIS *WIFE OF THE HEART*.

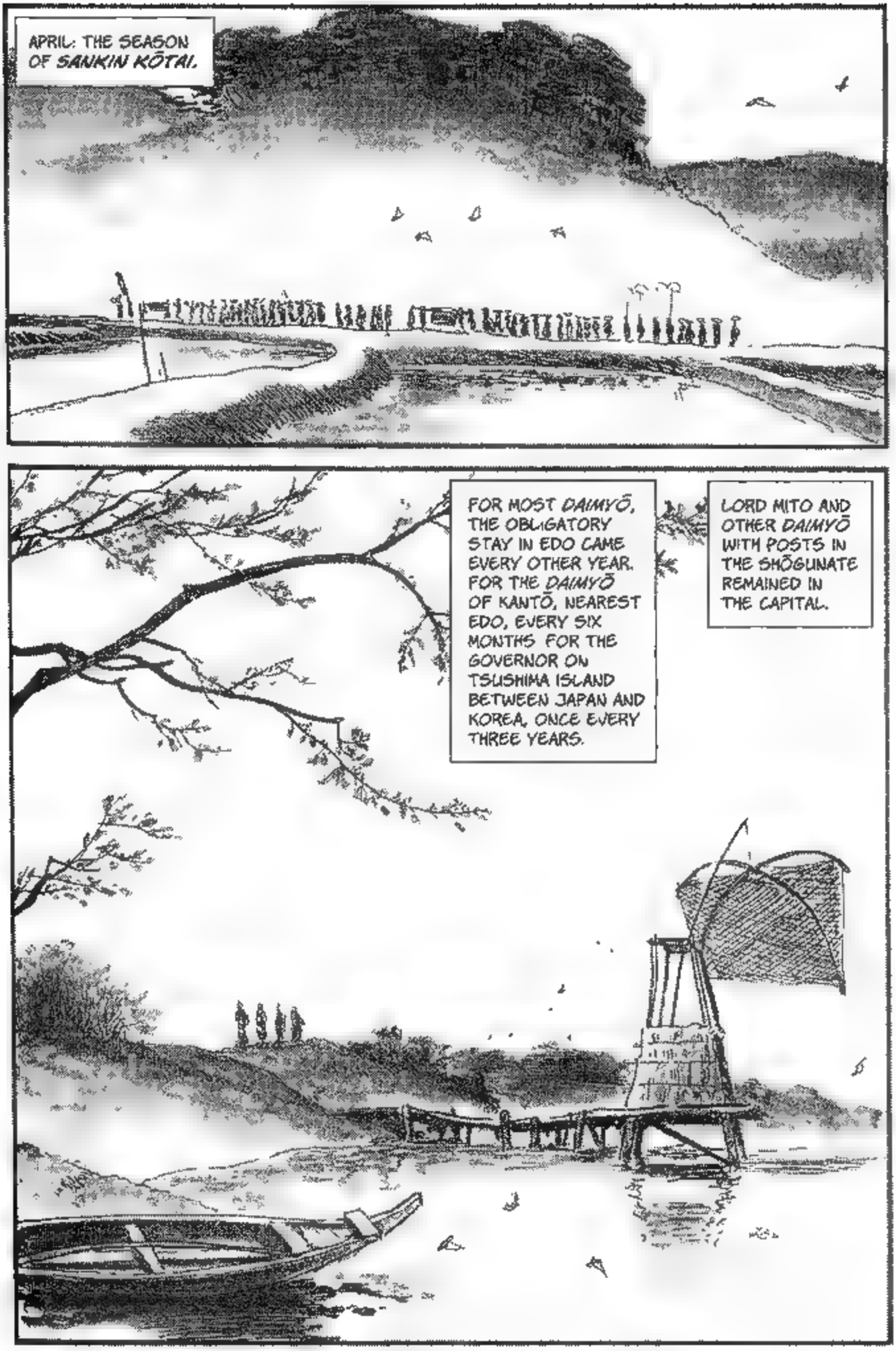


MY *HUS-BAND?*

WIFE OF THE HEART.

the forty-sixth

Wandering Samurai


APRIL: THE SEASON OF *SANKIN KŌTAI.*
FOR MOST *DAIMYŌ*, THE OBLIGATORY STAY IN EDO CAME EVERY OTHER YEAR. FOR THE *DAIMYŌ* OF KANTŌ, NEAREST EDO, EVERY SIX MONTHS. FOR THE GOVERNOR ON TSUSHIMA ISLAND BETWEEN JAPAN AND KOREA, ONCE EVERY THREE YEARS.
LORD MITO AND OTHER *DAIMYŌ* WITH POSTS IN THE SHŌGUNATE REMAINED IN THE CAPITAL.

WATARI-KACHI WAS THE WINDOW-DRESSING OF THE *SANKIN KŌTAI* SYSTEM. WHILE WEALTHY *DAIMYŌ* COULD AFFORD THE RETAINERS IT TOOK TO PROVIDE BOTH PROTECTION AND MAJESTY ON THE ROAD TO AND FROM EDO, A *DAIMYŌ* FROM A *HAN* WITH A TAX BASE OF A HUNDRED THOUSAND *KOKU* OR LESS COULD NOT AFFORD SUCH LUXURY. AND SO THEY TURNED TO TEMPORARY *KACHI* FOOT SOLDIERS. THE LOWEST OF THE LOW IN SAMURAI SOCIETY, HIRED ON FOR THE DURATION OF THE *SANKIN KOTAI* JOURNEY. ON THE OUTSIDE, LOW-RANKING *BUSHI*; ON THE INSIDE, SOMETHING ELSE ALTOGETHER. THESE BANDS OF HIRED "STRAW MEN" WERE THE MUTANT OFFSPRING OF THE DEFORMATIONS OF *BUKE* SOCIETY.

SERVING NO FIXED MASTER, SWITCHING ALLEGIANCE BY THE SEASON, THE MERCENARY *WATARI-KACHI* SOON TURNED *LAWLESS.*

AND SINCE THEY NEED ONLY SLIP THROUGH THE CLOSELY GUARDED CHECKPOINTS AND INTO THEIR EMPLOYER'S MAN TO THROW OFF ANY PURSUER, THEY WERE MORE FEARED AND HATED ALONG

THIS YEAR WOULD BE NO EXCEPTIO-

STILL HAVEN'T SEEN A GOOD WOMAN YET

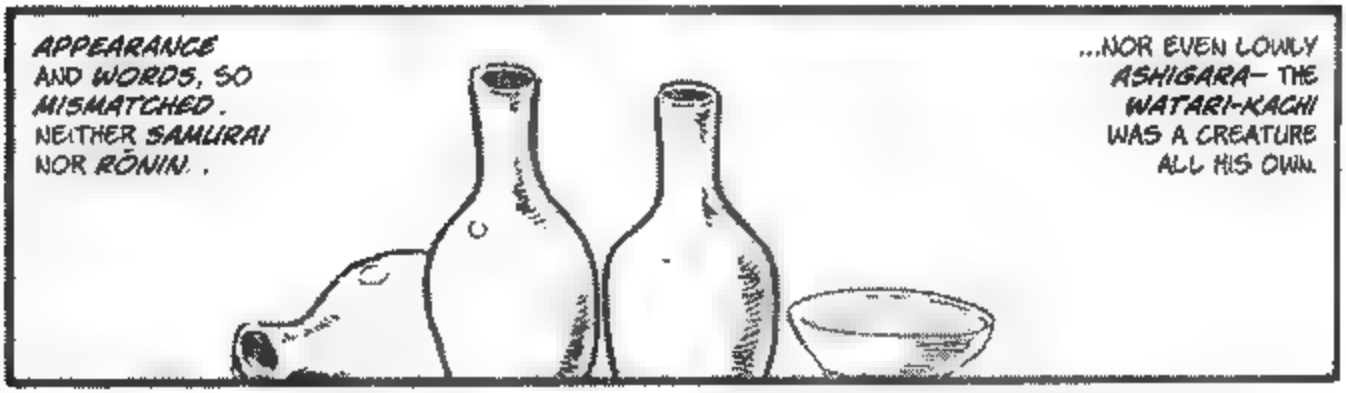
PATIENCE, PATIENCE.
WE'RE IN NO RUSH. WE'VE GOT FOUR DAYS TO GET THERE

YEAH, BUT THE ONLY FUN WE EVER GET OUTTA THIS SHIT JOB IS A GOOD PIECE OF ASS

IF IT WASN'T FOR THAT I'D HAVE DUMPED THIS CRAP LONG AGO

OH, YEAH...ANY BITCH ON THE HIGHWAY, YOURS FOR THE TAKING. MAKES ALL THE BULLSHIT WORTHWHILE, EH?

THOUGH SOME OF US DON'T SEEM T' THINK SO. HEH, HEH!


APPEARANCE AND WORDS, SO MISMATCHED. NEITHER SAMURAI NOR RŌNIN.
...NOR EVEN LOWLY ASHIGARA— THE WATARI-KACHI WAS A CREATURE ALL HIS OWN.

YO! MASTER KANBEI! WANT A SLUG?
NO.

YOU'RE ONE TOUGH BUGGER TO GET ALONG WITH.
CAN'T RELAX AROUND YOU, PAL.

MAYBE YOU WERE SOME SUPER SAMURAI ONCE, BUT YOU'RE A WATARI-KACHI NOW...SO DON'T BE SUCH A FRIGGIN' TIGHT-ASS!
....
....

WHOA ...!

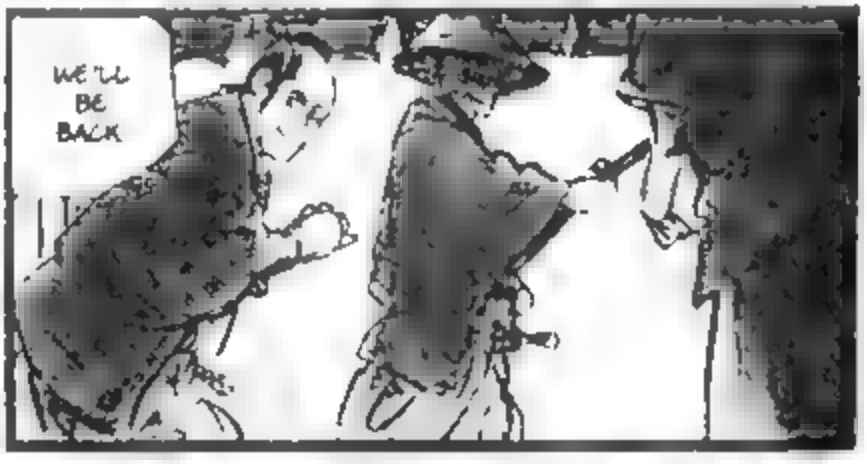
NOW THAT'S ALL RIGHT THE WHOLE SIXTY WIFE BIT
DIBS ON THE DAUGHTER!

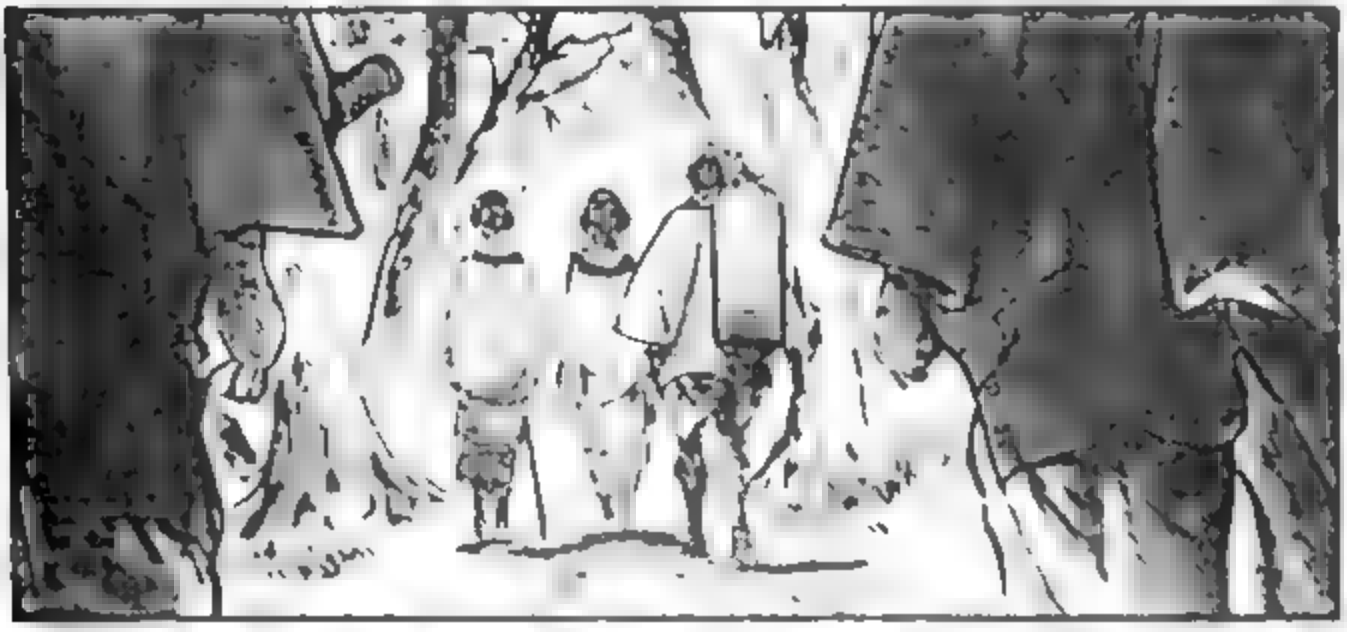
GO FOR IT?
LIKE YOU COULD STOP ME?

KANBEI-SAN DON'T YOU LIKE THE LADIES?
. . .
. . . .

LET ME EXPLAIN THIS WATARI-KACHI BUSINESS, PAL. YOU CAN HAVE ANY WOMAN YOU WANT, SEE? THEY DON'T LIKE IT, TOUGH SHIT! WHAT ARE THEY GONNA DO? GO WHINING TO THE DAIMYŌ?!

OKAY, THEN
UP TO YOU! WAIT HERE, OKAY?


WE'LL BE BACK

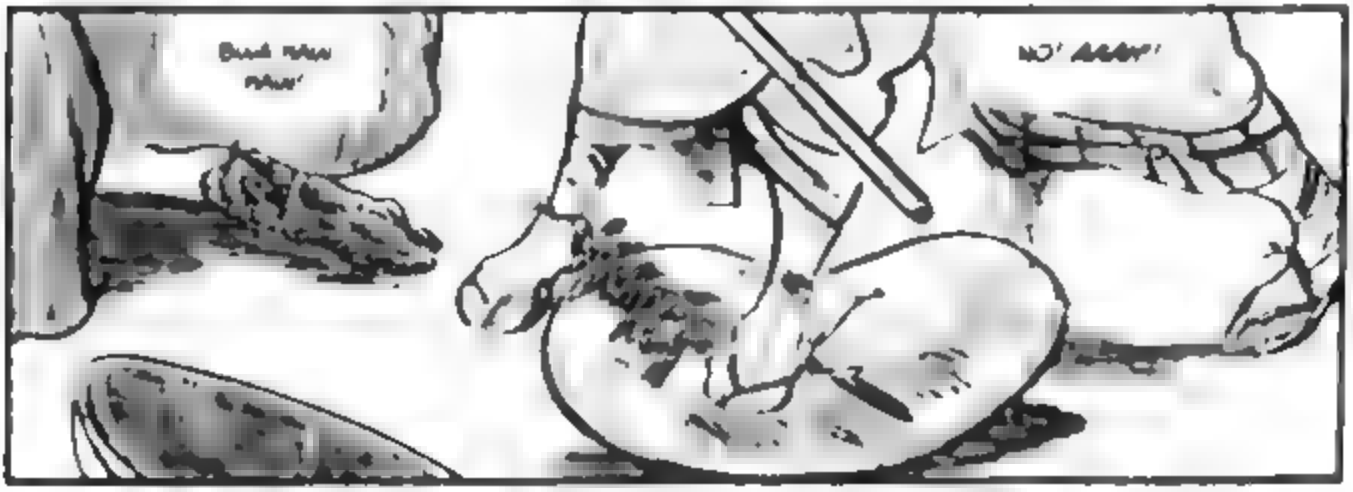


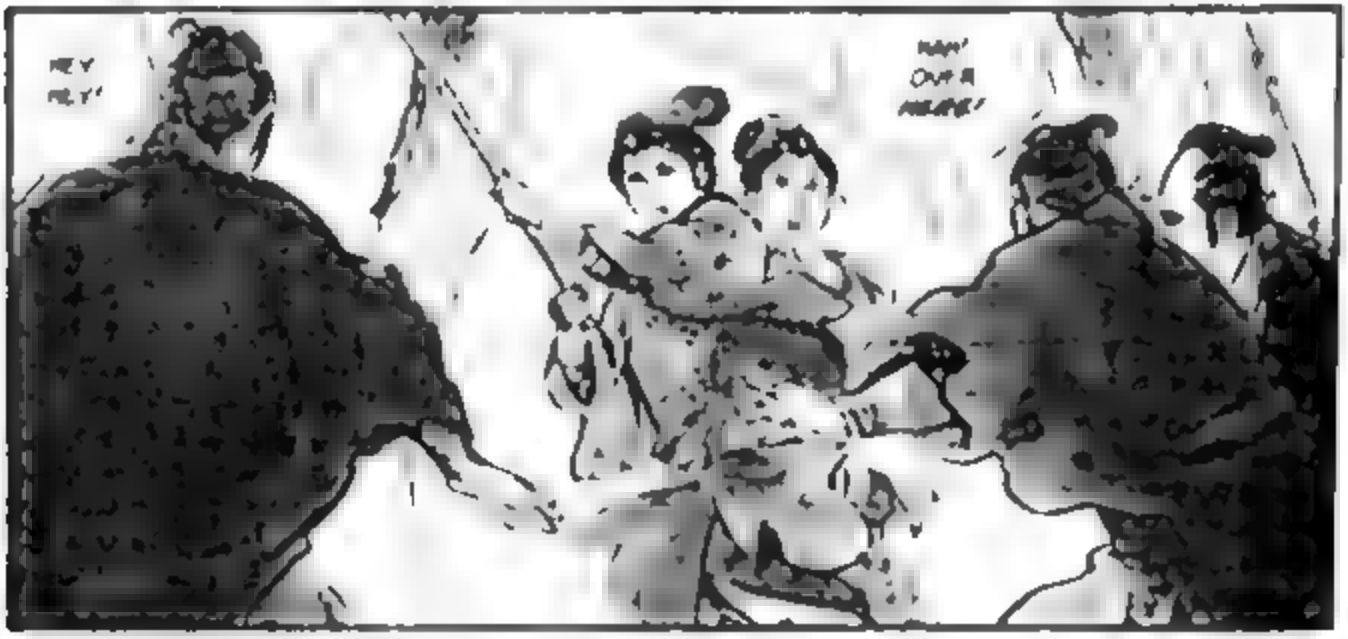
IN A FEW DAYS WE'LL
GIVE IT UP
SO THE SECRET, MA'AM, IS TO LIE BACK AND ENJOY IT. SHUT YOUR EYES FOR AN HOUR, AND IT'LL ALL BE OVER

WE DON'T TAKE NOTHING,

IT'S NOT LIKE YOU CAN RUN OUT, RIGHT? USE IT OR LOSE IT, DON'T THEY SAY? WE'RE JUST HERE TO HELP

MOTHER


NO!


HEY, HEY!
OVER HERE!

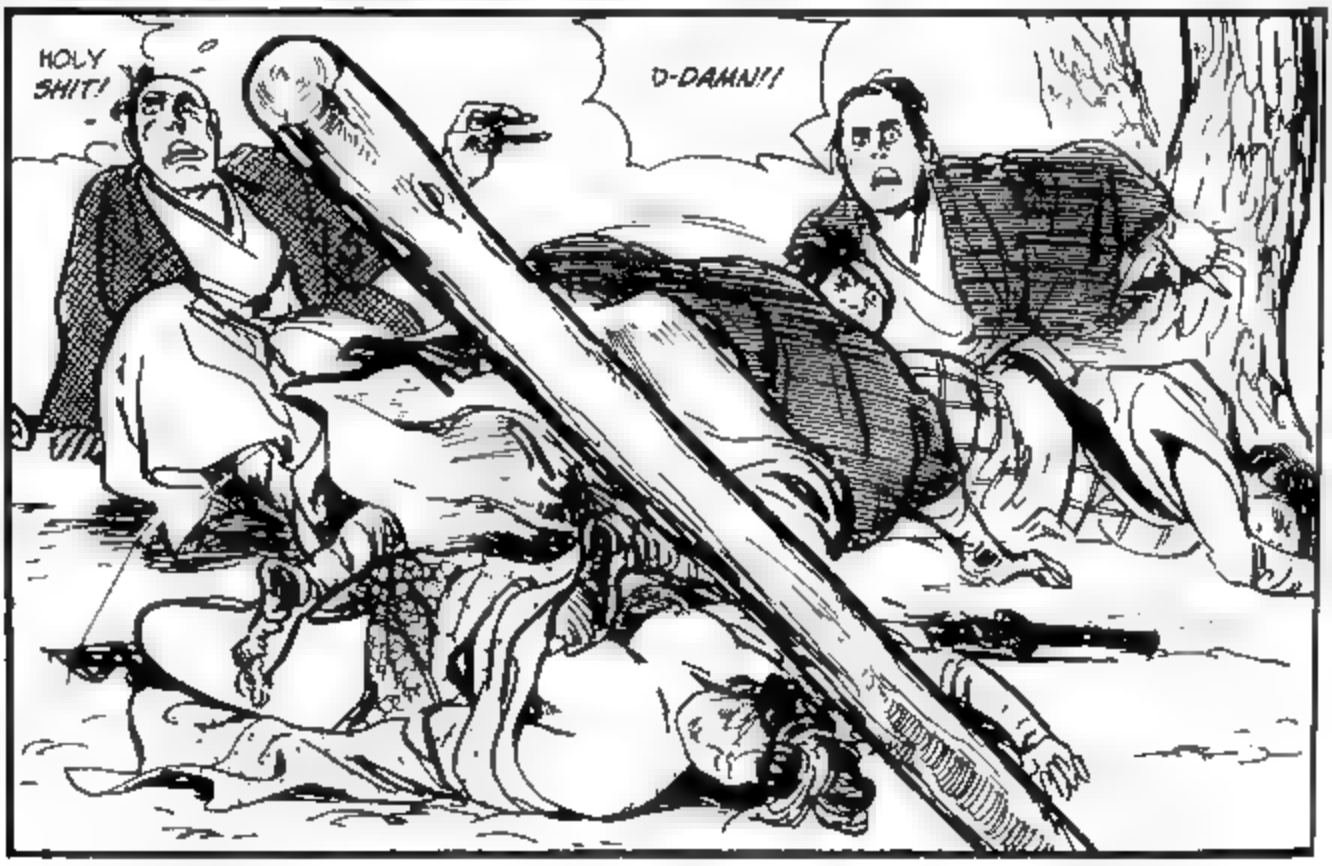
NO YA DON'T

AHH!!

NO NO
NO!!!

NGG. ..?
AAAH?!
HYAA!
BAS-TARDS! SCUM!!

RYAAAA!


HOLY SHIT!
D-DAMN!!

HAIEEYAA!
OW!!

WHOA!!!

I, I'LL CHOP YOU!
AHRNNG!! Y-YOU-!
YOU BASTARDS! MY LADY! AND THE YOUNG MISS!

YOW!
I'LL SMASH YOUR BRAINS OUT!
SCUM!!
DAMN YOU!
YIIK!

KIAAA
KRANNG

OWW! AUGH!
KRAKK
WHOK
HELP! HELP!

I'LL KILL YOU FOR THIS!
W-WAIT! STOP!!
IF . IF ANYTHING HAPPENS TO US, YOU'RE DEAD, TOO!

H-HE'S RIGHT! WE'RE ON OUR WAY TO GUARD MIZUNO-SAMA OF KARIYA HAN!

IF YOU HURT US, MIZUNO-SAMA WILL—
TO HELL WITH HIM! YOU'RE GONNA PAY, YOU ROTTEN BASTARDS!

I'LL KILL YOU!!
HSSSSH

AAG!
HELP! SOME-BODY!

K-KANBEI-SAN!
SAVE US! HE'S—
RYAAA!

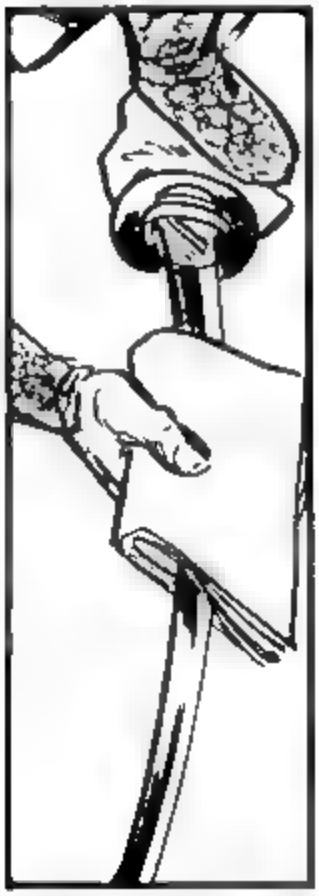
CHOKK

NOYAAH

WHOA!!
SH-
SHIT!!

OH,
OH ?!

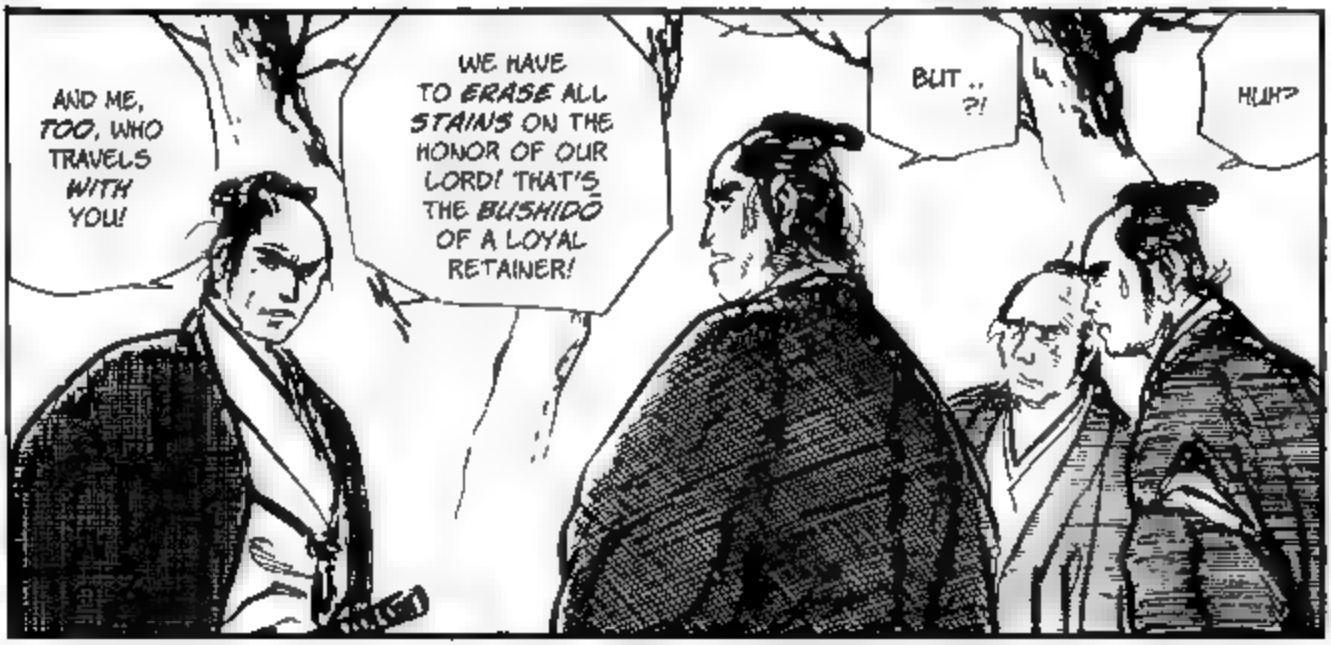
FORGIVE ME!
SHUK
AHGH!!
SLASH



K-K-
KANBEI-
SAN?!
OH, GOD
DID .DID YOU
HAVE TO KILL
THEM?!

IF YOU'D JUST ACTED AS NAMELESS WATARI-KACHI, I COULD HAVE TURNED MY BACK!
IT WAS NONE OF MY BUSINESS!

BUT YOU INVOKED THE NAME OF OUR EMPLOYER! THAT MAKES YOU KARIYA HAN HANSHI, NOT WATARI-KACHI!


AND ME, TOO, WHO TRAVELS WITH YOU!
WE HAVE TO ERASE ALL STAINS ON THE HONOR OF OUR LORD! THAT'S THE BUSHIDŌ OF A LOYAL RETAINER!
BUT .. ?!
HUH?

AND NOW, ONE OF YOU WILL TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THIS OUTRAGE!
WHA--?!
K-KANBEI.

ONE OF YOU WILL BECOME A ROBBER WHO ATTACKED THIS MOTHER AND DAUGHTER AND THEIR SERVANT!
YOU KILLED THEM, AND WE WITNESSED IT! YOU ATTACKED, AND WE CUT YOU DOWN! THAT STORY WILL CONVINCE THE OFFICERS AT THE NEXT WAY-STATION— CASE CLOSED!

SO WHO SHALL BE THE ROBBER?!
Y YOU GOTTA BE.
BUT...K-KANBEI-SAN! N..NOBODY'LL KNOW! W-WE JUST GOTTA MAKE IT TO KARIYA HAN!
LET US OFF! JUST THIS ONCE!

AAAAH?!
GINGG

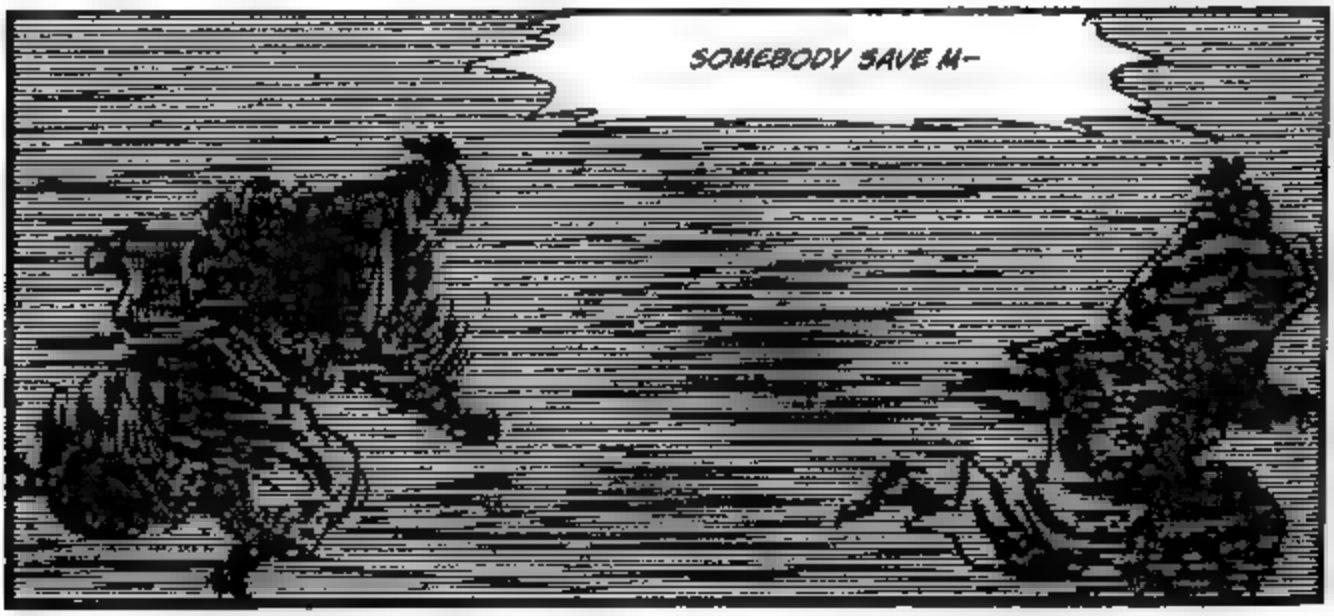
TAKE ONE EACH.

DO IT OR YOU ALL DIE!

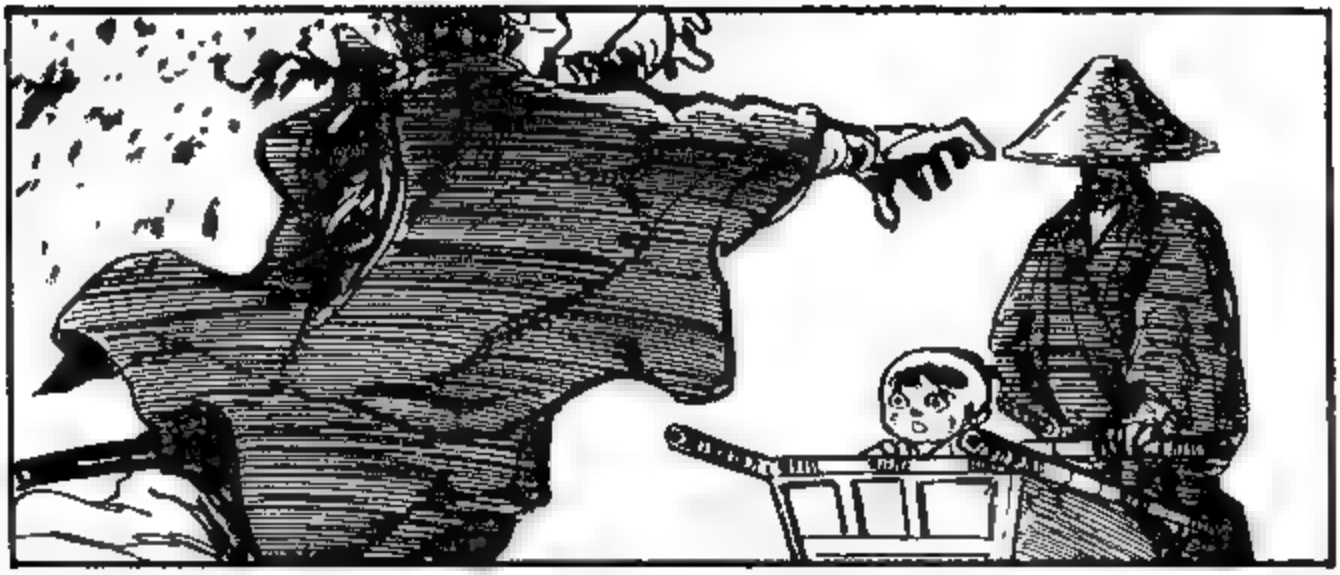
Y YES, SIR!

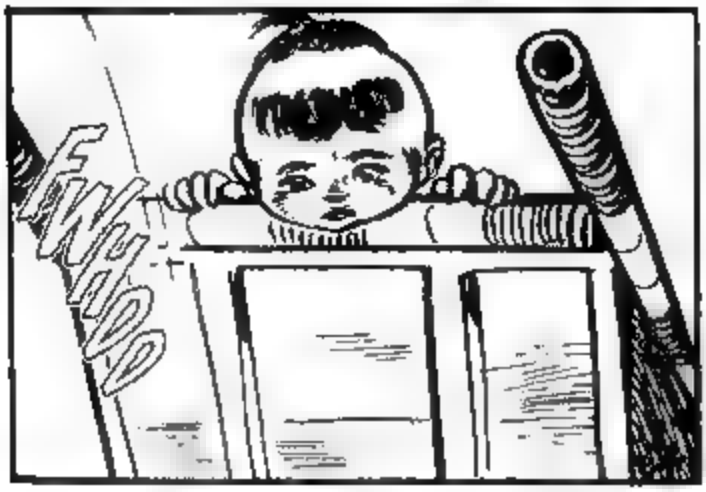
YOU!
N- NO!

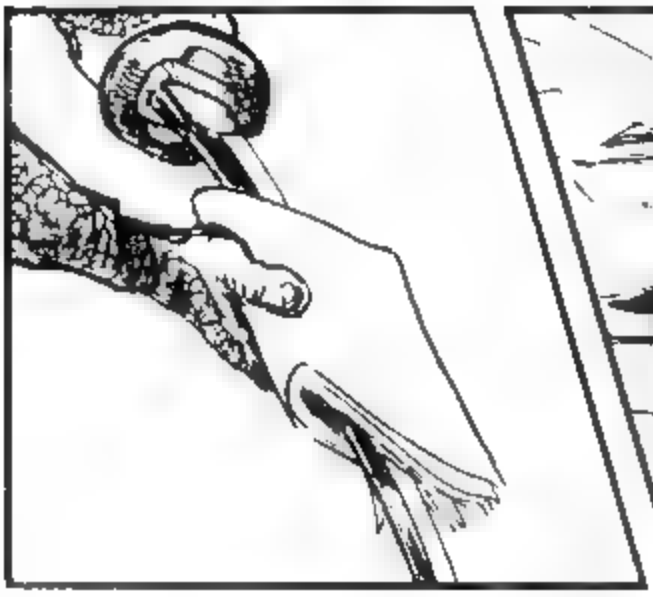
S-
SAVE
ME!!

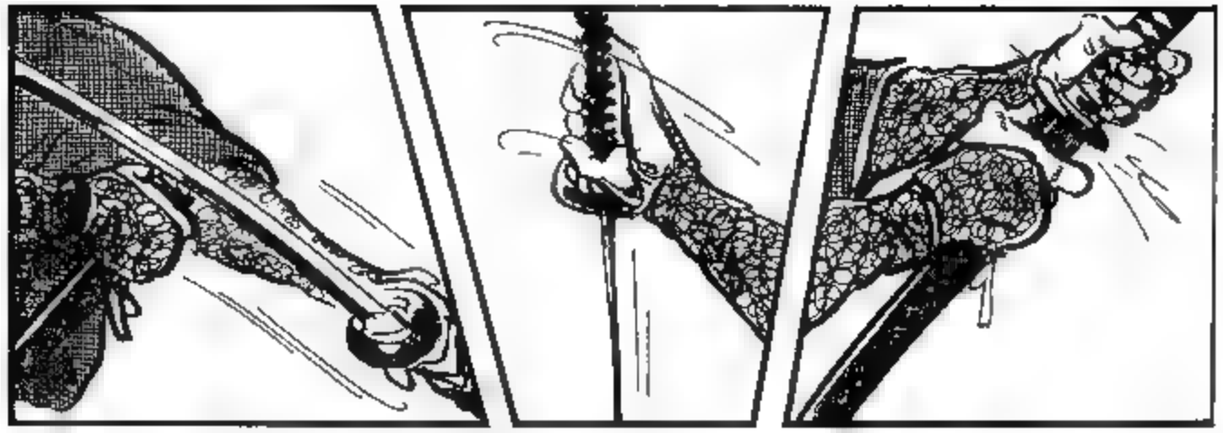

SOMEBODY SAVE M-

NNGAHHH!
SKUSSH

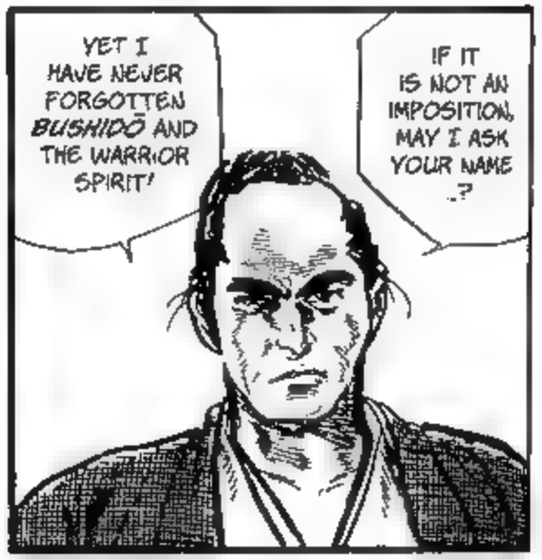


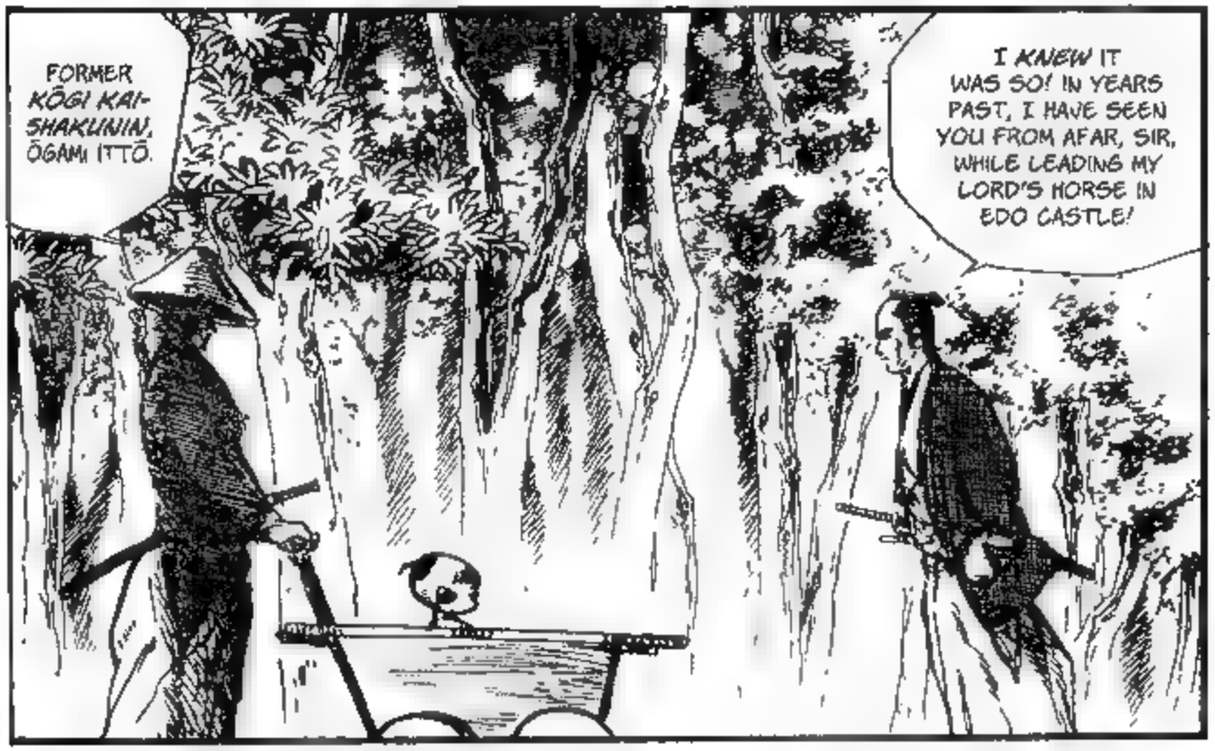

FWHOP

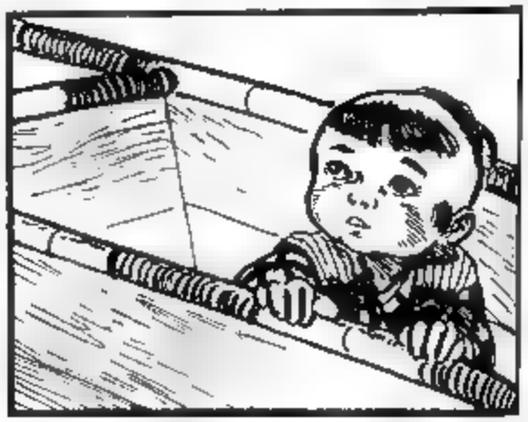




AKAMA GENJŪRŌ, FORMER PALANQUIN GUARD OF MARUOKA HAN.
ON VOLUNTARY LEAVE, I NOW LIVE AS A WATARI-KACHI


YET I HAVE NEVER FORGOTTEN BUSHIDŌ AND THE WARRIOR SPIRIT!
IF IT IS NOT AN IMPOSITION, MAY I ASK YOUR NAME ..?

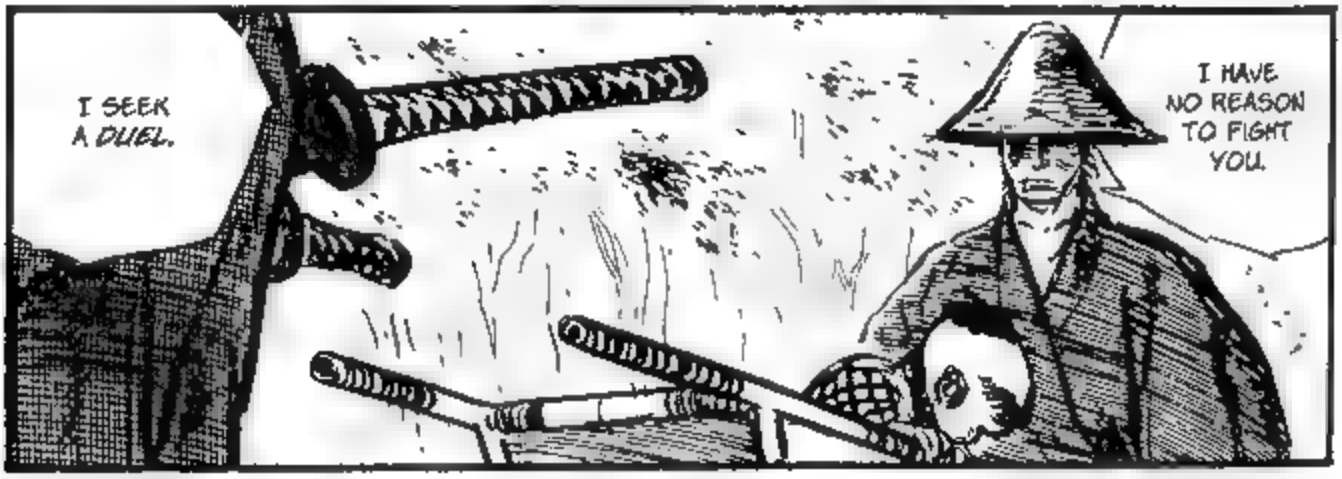

FORMER KŌGI KAI-SHAKUNIN, ŌGAMI ITTŌ.
I KNEW IT WAS SO! IN YEARS PAST, I HAVE SEEN YOU FROM AFAR, SIR, WHILE LEADING MY LORD'S HORSE IN EDO CASTLE!



AND I HAVE HEARD OF AKAMA GENJŪRŌ
A MASTER OF KAGE-RYŪ IN THE MARUOKA HAN PALANQUIN GUARD.
YOU FLATTER ME, SIR...AND NOW I FEAR I HAVE OFFENDED YOUR EYES. PLEASE UNDERSTAND THAT CIRCUMSTANCES LEFT ME NO CHOICE

. . . .
. . . .

ALLOW ME TO EXPLAIN...
TO WHAT END?


I SEEK A DUEL.
I HAVE NO REASON TO FIGHT YOU.

YET I DO!

WHEN A WATARI-KACHI FINDS EMPLOYMENT, HE BECOMES A HANSHI.

I UNDER-STAND THAT THE TRUE BUSHI IS READY ALWAYS TO DIE TO PRESERVE HIS LORD FROM HARM, EVEN TO MERELY FORE-STALL IT

YOUR ARRIVAL HERE AT THIS MOMENT IS REASON ENOUGH.
BZZZZ
A SHOCKING EVENT HAS OCCURRED, FOR THE BASEST REASONS. .

AND THUS I MUST DRAG OGAMI DOHO INTO THIS SORDID AFFAIR, ALTHOUGH IT READS MY HEART
YOU HAVE ALREADY SEEN THESE CORPSES I HAVE NO CHOICE

PLEASE!
....
....

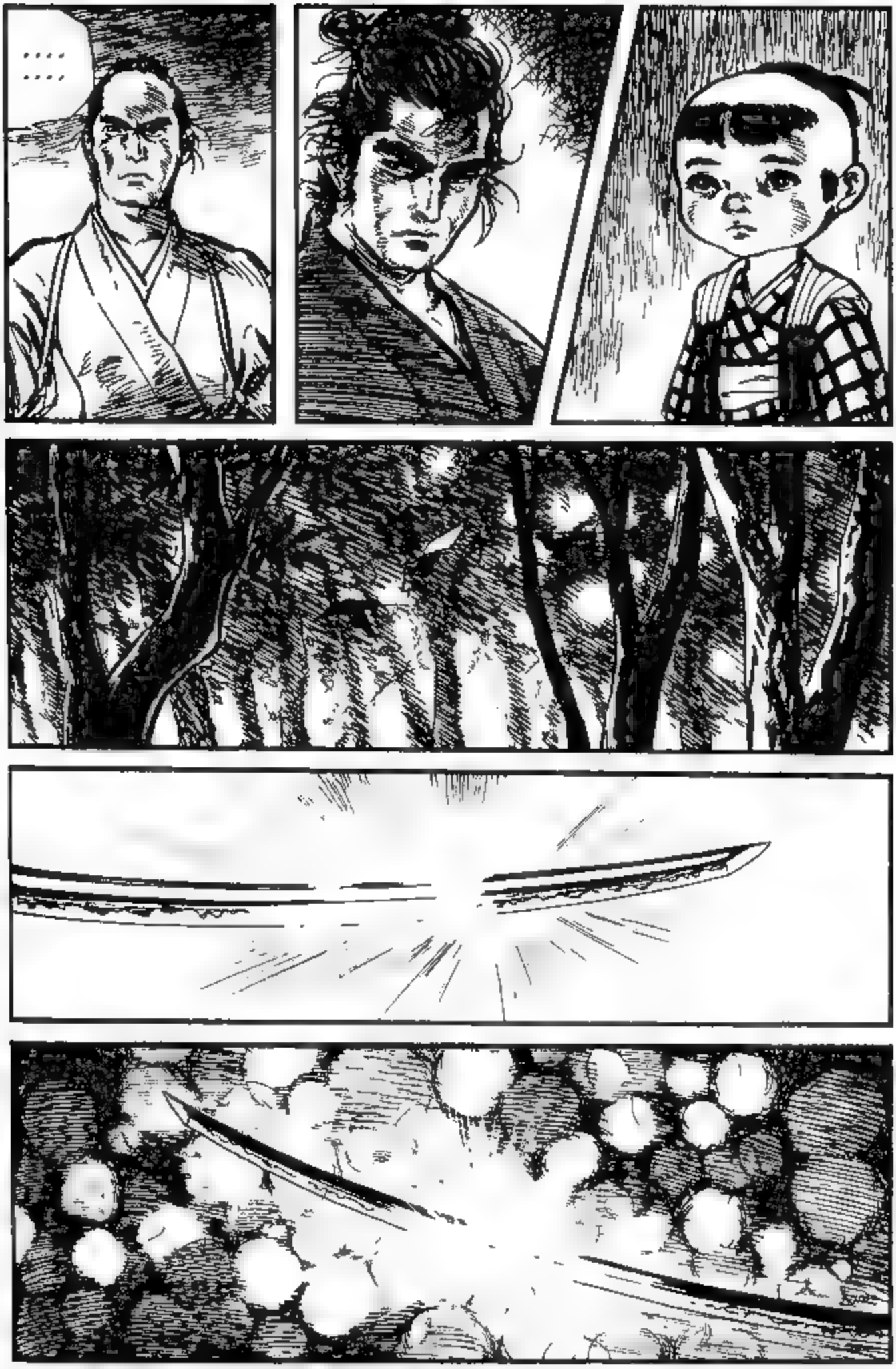
FIRST, I SHALL EXPLAIN WHAT HAPPENED
THAT IS UNNECESSARY
IF A BUSHI OF YOUR REPUTE INSISTS, THEN IT MUST BE FATE.

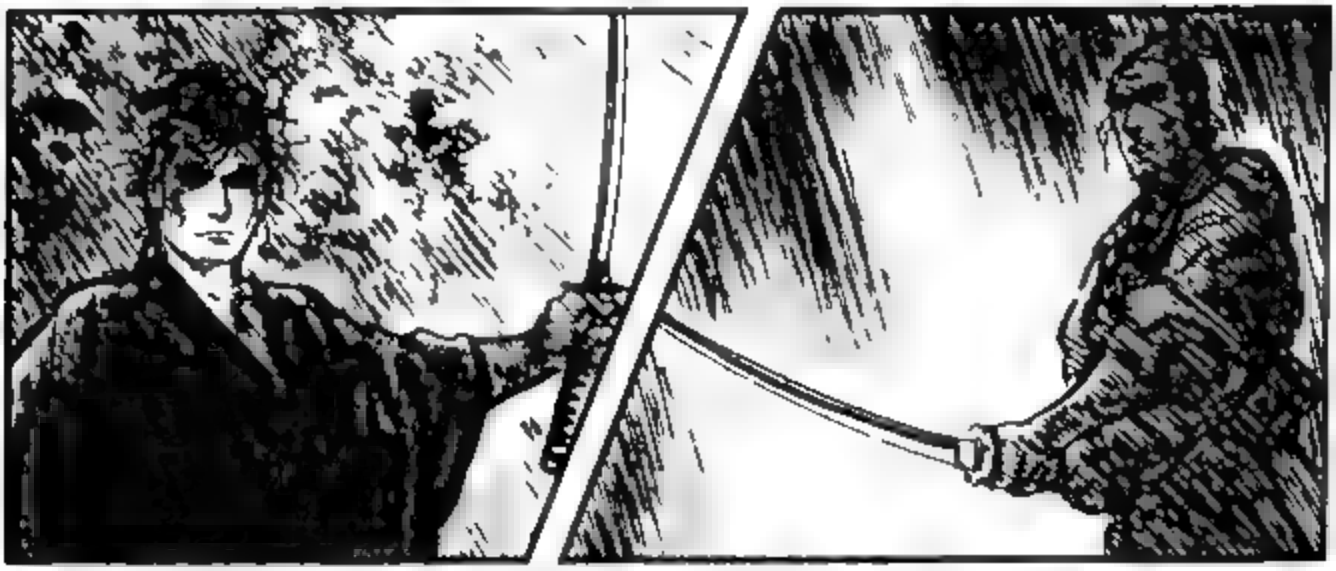
I ACCEPT
MY THANKS!

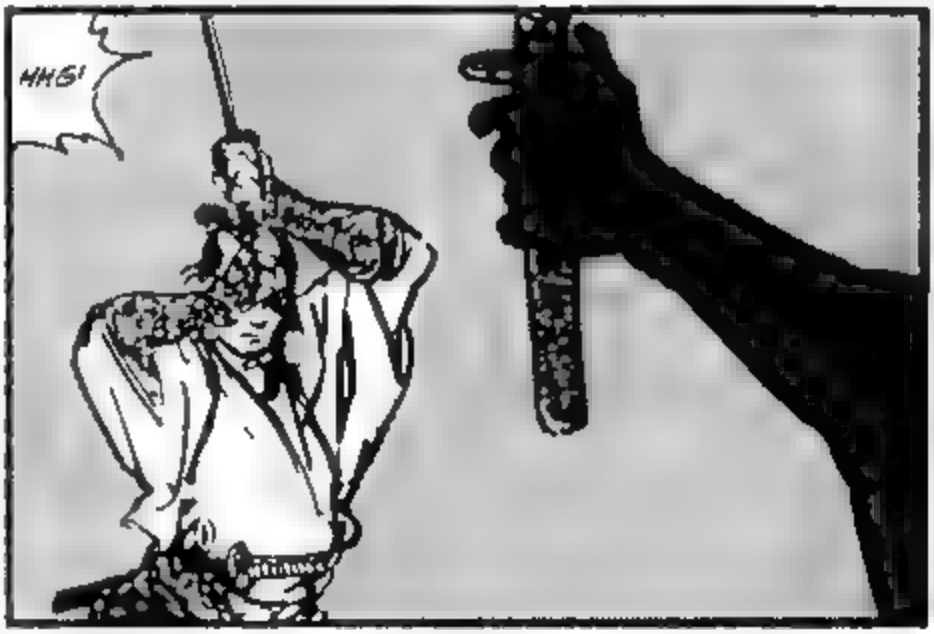
SHOULD I PREVAIL, I GIVE YOU MY WORD—

—I WILL PROTECT YOUR CHILD WITH MY LIFE.
I ASK INSTEAD THAT YOU LEAVE HIM BEHIND YOU. FATHER AND SON..

...WE LIVE IN *MEIFUMADŌ*, ACCEPTING THE TRIALS OF THE *SIX PATHS* AND THE *FOUR LIVES*

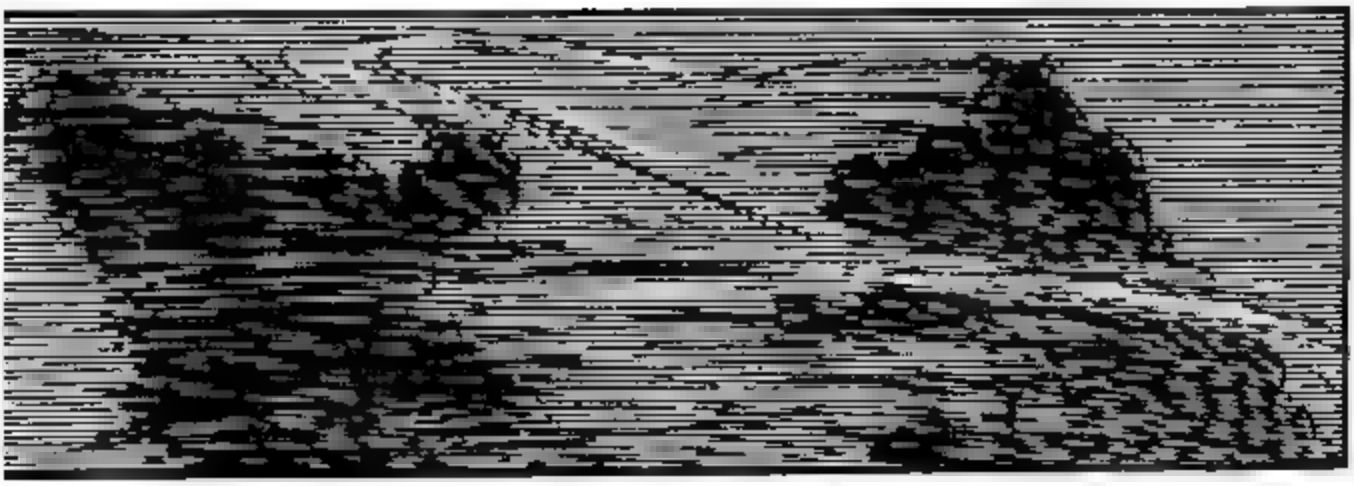





HHG!

SHANGG

KSHUNGG

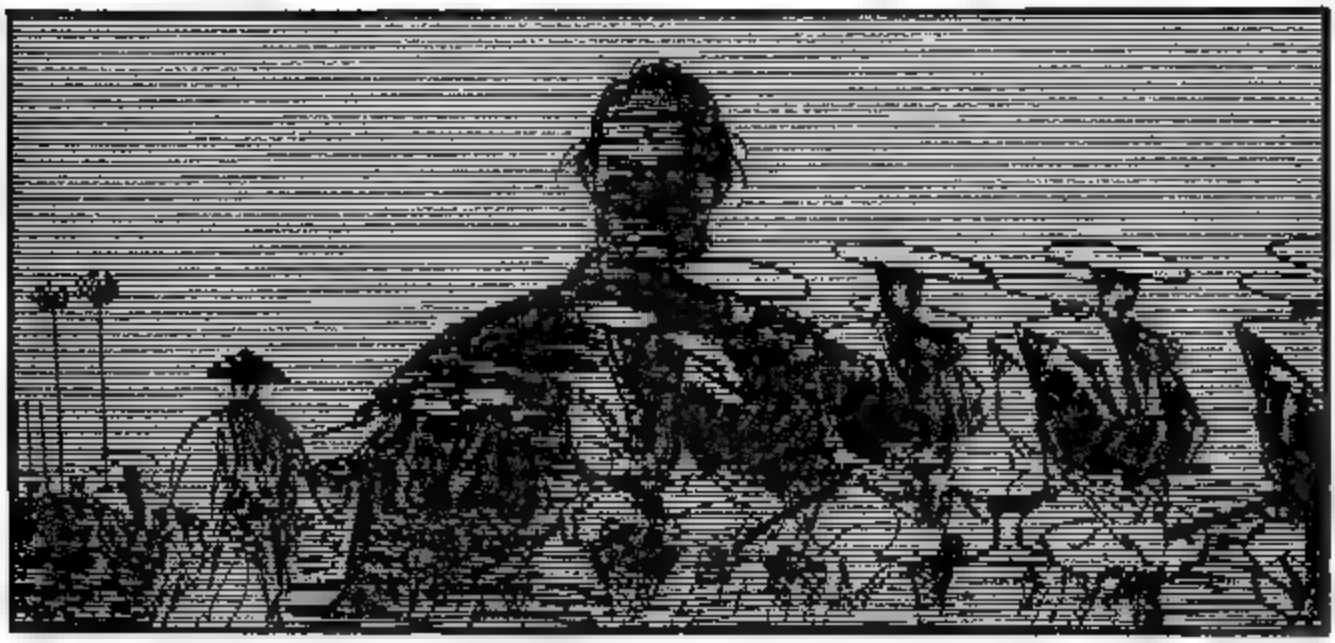


CHK

ŌGAMI-DONO! I SEEK YOUR JUDGMENT!

SPEAK!
I HAVE WALKED THE PATH OF *BUSHIDŌ* AS A PALANQUIN GUARD, ENTRUSTED WITH THE LIFE OF MY LORD

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, MY MASTER, LORD MUNETADA, WAS APPOINTED *RŌJŪ*.
BUT AS HE TRAVELED TO EDO TO TAKE UP THE POST

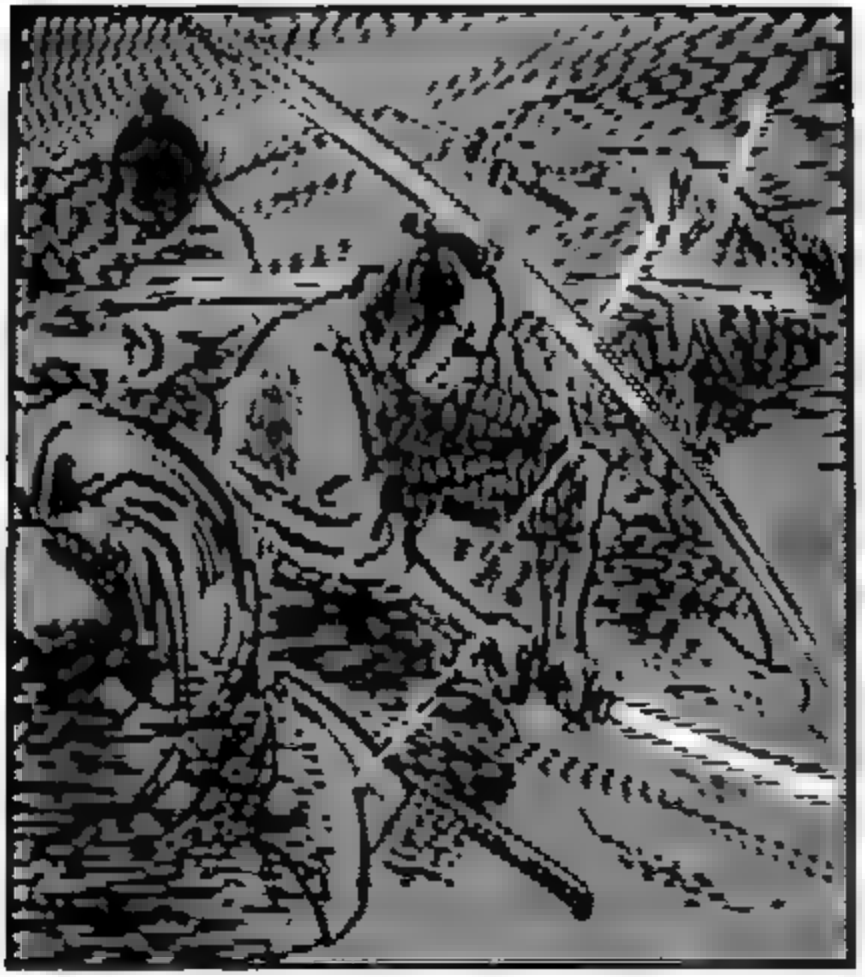


"WE WERE SUDDENLY BESET BY A BAND OF NAMELESS *RONIN.*

"IT WAS AN *AMBUSH,* PLANNED BY FORCES OPPOSED TO MY LORD'S APPOINTMENT

"BELIEVING THAT *OFFENSE* IS THE BEST *DEFENSE* AGAINST SUPERIOR FORCE.

"...AND HOPING TO BLUNT THE ENEMY'S MOMENTUM AND SHATTER HIS MORALE, I CHARGED INTO THEIR *MIDST!*"

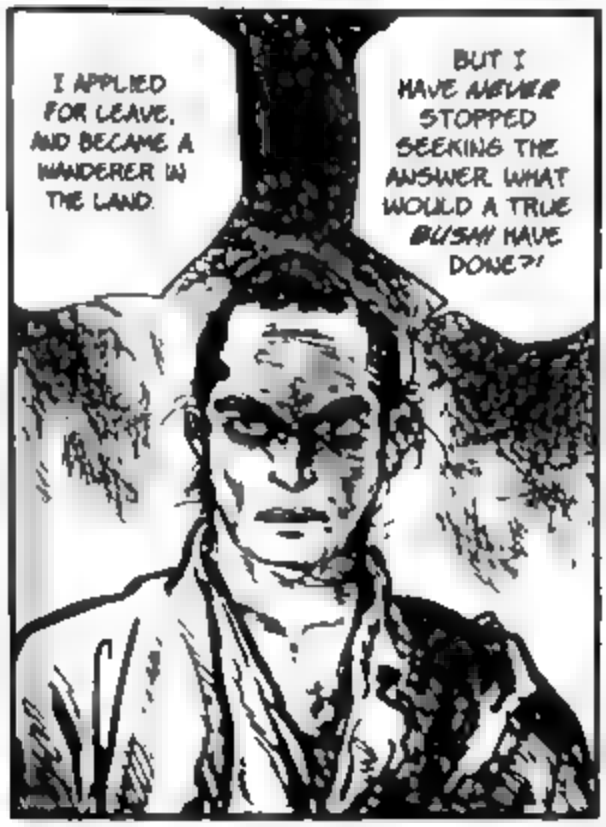


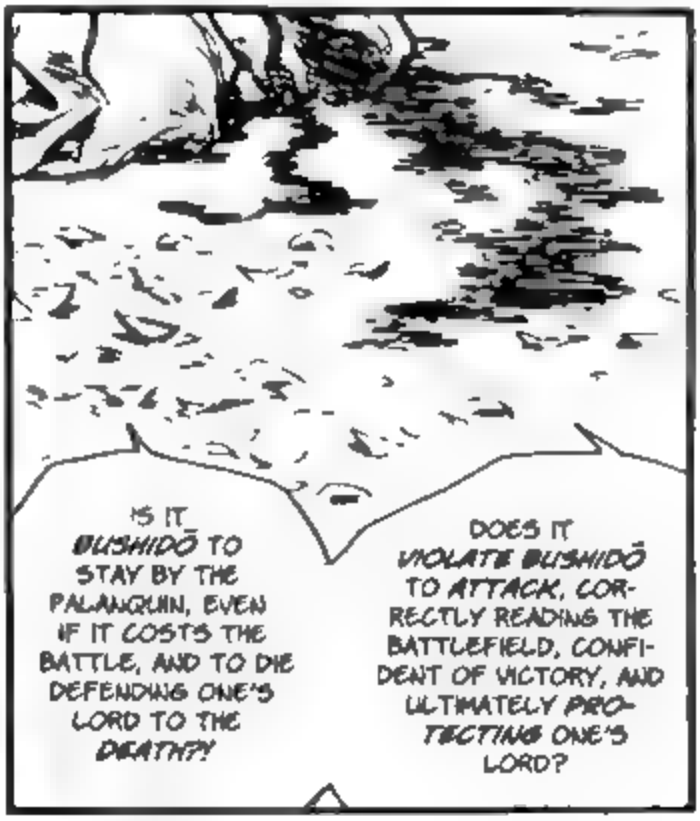
MY JUDGMENT PROVED CORRECT, AND THE ASSAULT WAS REPULSED

YET THE MOOD IN THE HAN TURNED AGAINST ME!

HOW DARE I CHARGE?!, THEY SAID. A TRUE BUSHI WOULD STAY AT THE PALANQUIN'S SIDE TO PROTECT OUR LORD!
OVERCONFIDENCE IN MY SWORD HAD LED ME TO FLAUNT MY SKILL AND BREAK THE WARRIOR'S CODE!

I BELIEVED THAT IF I STAYED BY THE PALANQUIN, WE WOULD BE SURROUNDED, AND THE BATTLE LOST...AND SO I TOOK THE FIGHT TO THE ENEMY. YET...MY CRITICS HAD A POWERFUL CASE.


I APPLIED FOR LEAVE, AND BECAME A WANDERER IN THE LAND.
BUT I HAVE NEVER STOPPED SEEKING THE ANSWER. WHAT WOULD A TRUE BUSHI HAVE DONE?!


IS IT BUSHIDŌ TO STAY BY THE PALANQUIN, EVEN IF IT COSTS THE BATTLE, AND TO DIE DEFENDING ONE'S LORD TO THE DEATH?!
DOES IT VIOLATE BUSHIDŌ TO ATTACK, CORRECTLY READING THE BATTLEFIELD, CONFIDENT OF VICTORY, AND ULTIMATELY PROTECTING ONE'S LORD?

THE ANSWER ELUDES ME, AND THUS I HAVE BECOME A LOWLY *WATARI-KACHI*, ROOTLESS TO THIS DAY!

I THOUGHT THAT THIS WAY I MIGHT AGAIN FIND MYSELF DEFENDING A LORD'S PALANQUIN.
AND SO DISCOVER IN BATTLE THE ANSWER FOR WHICH I SEEK.

ŌGAMI-DONO! TELL ME! WHAT IS THE *PATH*—
NGK!

....
....

O-ŌGAMI-DONO!
WHAT IS *BUSHIDŌ*?!

BUSHIDÔ IS TO ALWAYS SERVE ONE'S LORD WITH DEATH IN ONE'S HEART!
THEN THEN WHAT I DID WAS

TO ATTACK, HOPING FOR VICTORY? YOUR JUDGMENT WAS RASH!
INDEED, YOU WERE OVER-CONFIDENT IN YOUR SWORD.

HRNNG. IT'S TRUE
THEN I WAS MISTAKEN ...?

I SPEAK ONLY OF THE DUTY OF A PALANQUIN GUARD THE TRUE BUSHI IS ALWAYS READY TO DIE FOR HIS LORD
AND THUS HE SERVES! TO DIE ATTACKING, TO DIE DEFENDING! THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE IN THE PURITY OF SPIRIT!

HAD I BEEN IN YOUR PLACE, I WOULD NOT HAVE STAYED BY THE PALANQUIN AND LET THE BATTLE BE LOST
I WOULD HAVE ATTACKED!

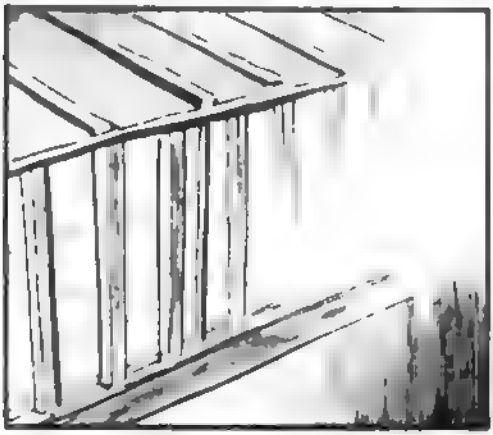
MY THANKS FOR THOSE WORDS

UHNN

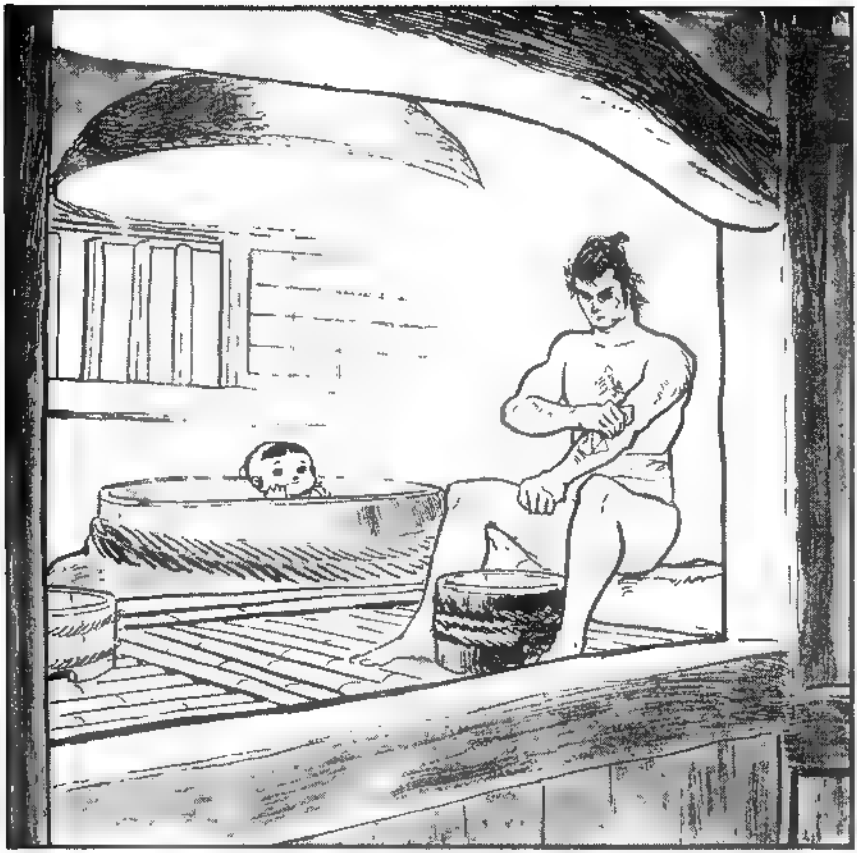
A WANDERING SAMURAI

the forty-seventh

Echo of the Assassin



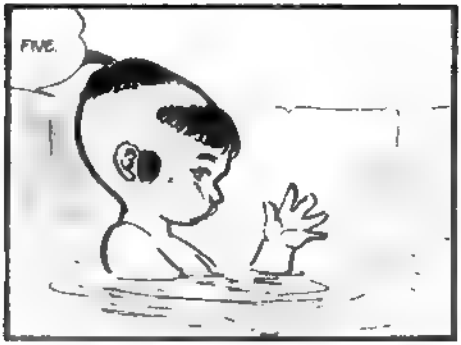
ONE
TWO
FREE



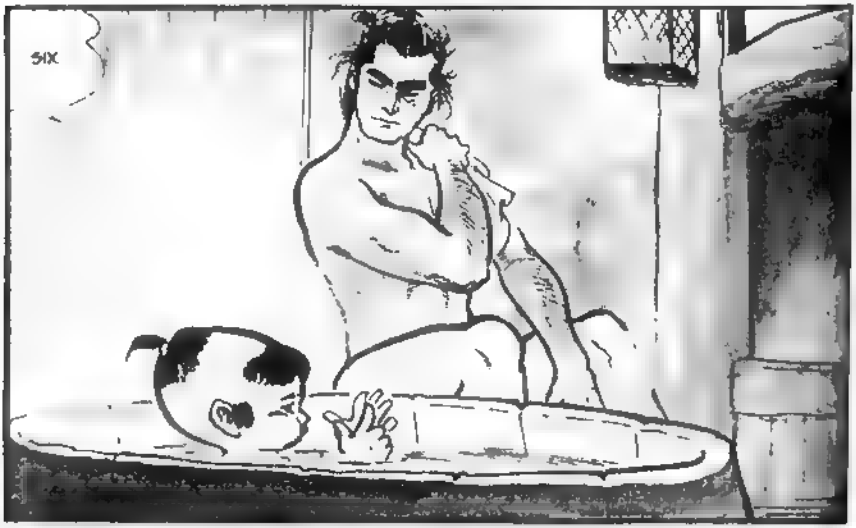
ONE...
TWO...
FREE.
FREE.

....
....

FO!


FIVE.

SIX.


SIX

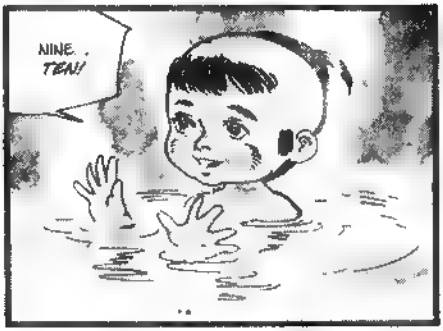
SIX
....
....

FIVE.
SIX.
SIX.

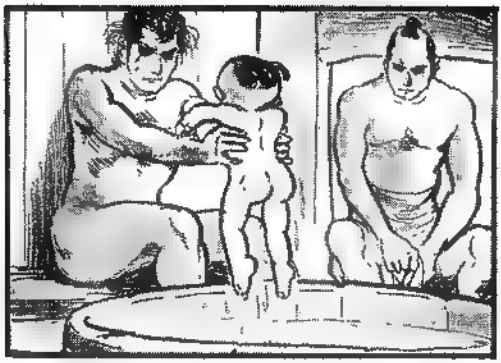
SEV'N.
EIGHT

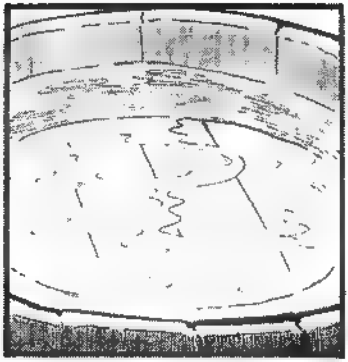
EIGHT.
EIGHT. .
EIGHT

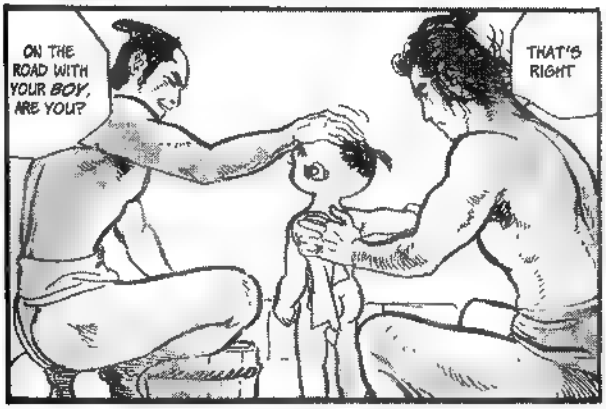
NINE!


NINE.
TEN!

ONE
MORE
TIME!






ON THE ROAD WITH YOUR BOY, ARE YOU?
THAT'S RIGHT

MY NAME'S TOYAMA KIKUMA IT LOOKS LIKE WE'RE LODGING TOGETHER TONIGHT

ŌGAMI ITTŌ
AND MY ONLY SON, DAIGORO

SKSSSSH

MMM..! NICE AND HOT!
JUST SOAKS THAT FATIGUE AWAY!

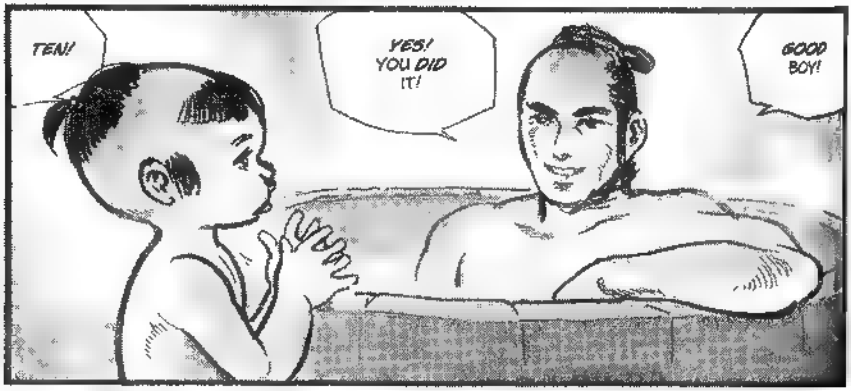
ONE...TEN.. FREE..
"TEN" .? THAT'S NOT RIGHT, SON!
HOW ABOUT TWO.

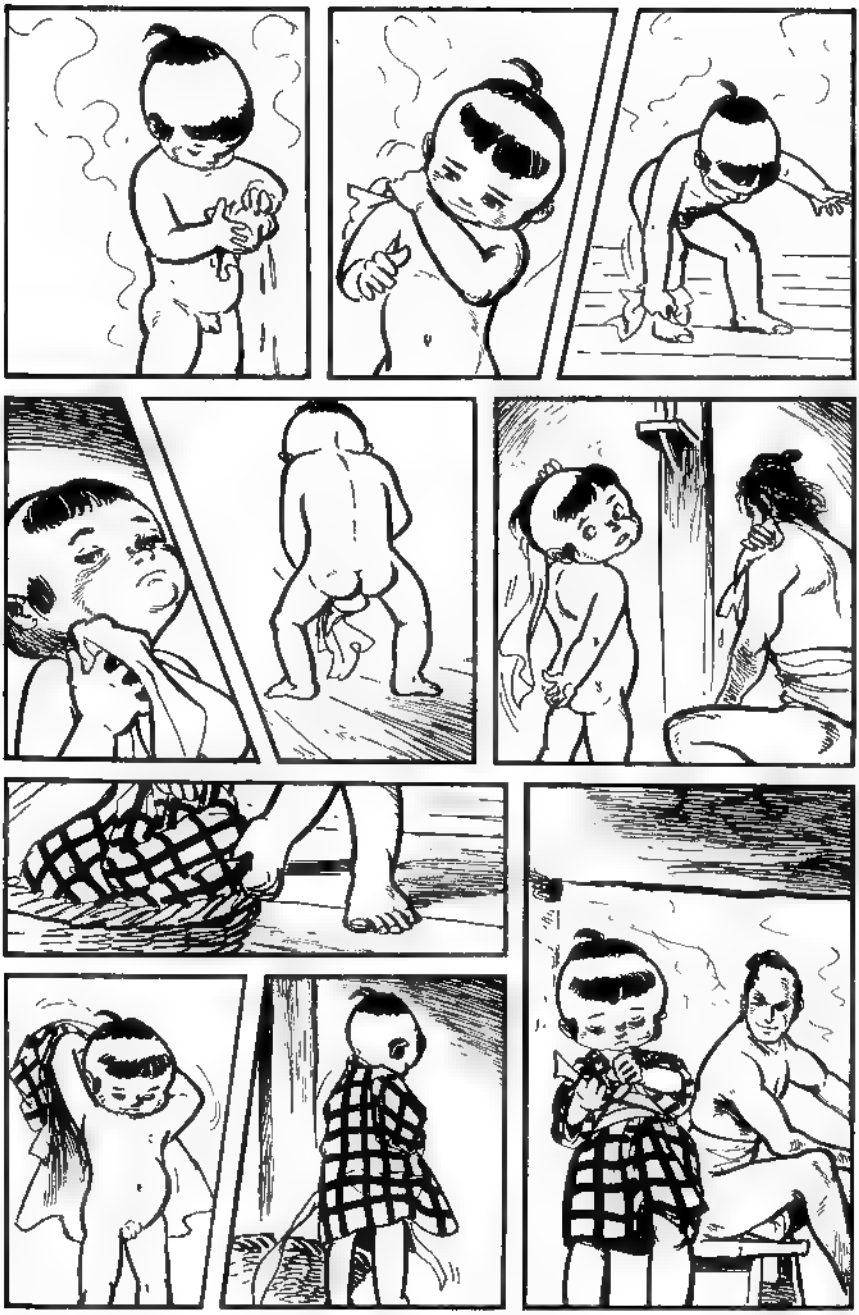
ONE.. TWO!

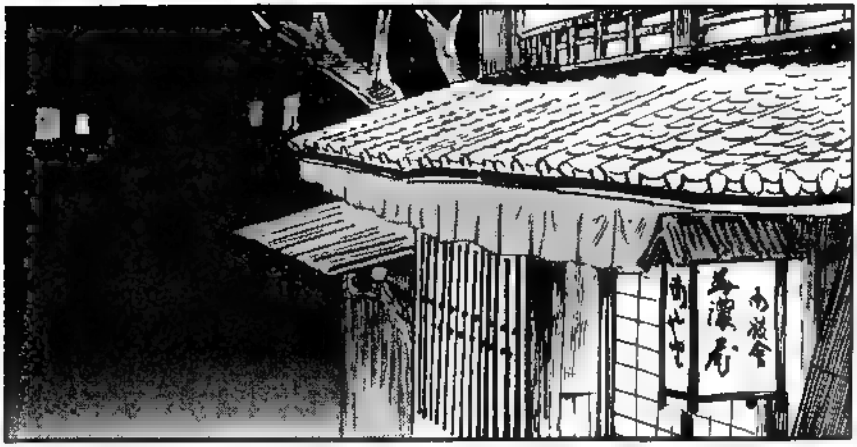
FREE.. FOUR..

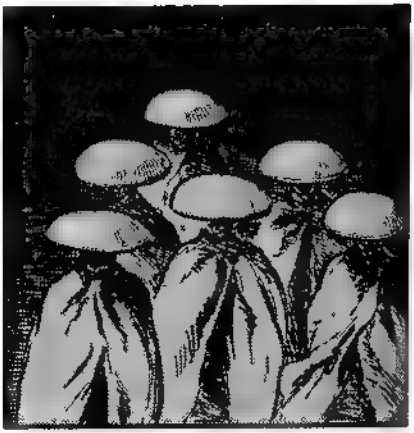
FIVE.. SIX..

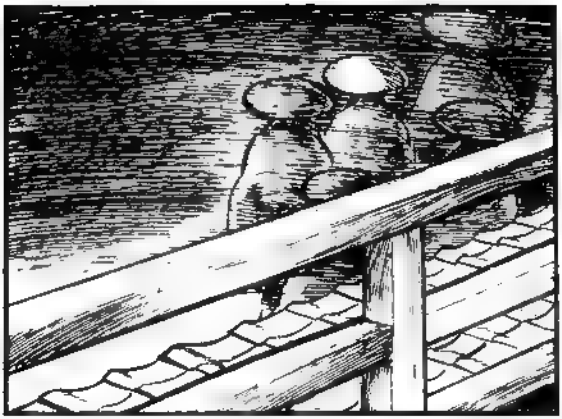
SEV'N...
EIGHT.. NINE...


TEN!
YES! YOU DID IT!
GOOD BOY!

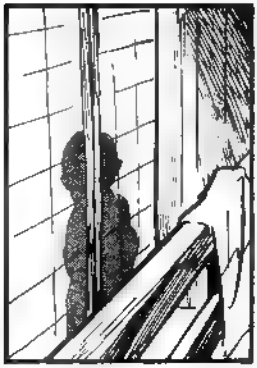


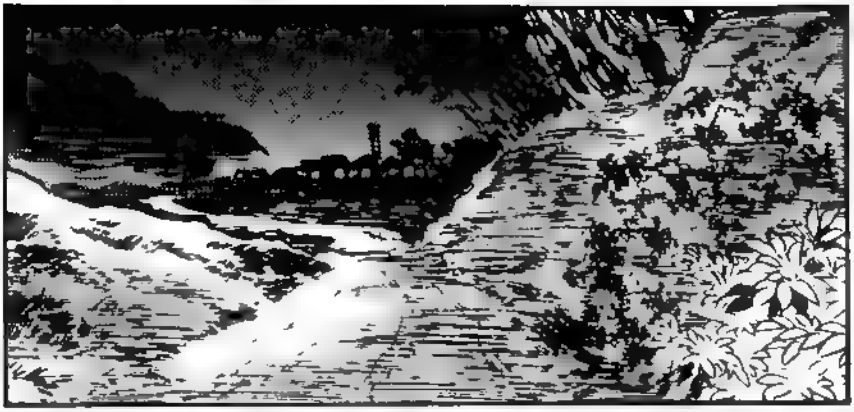

南無妙法蓮華経
南無妙法

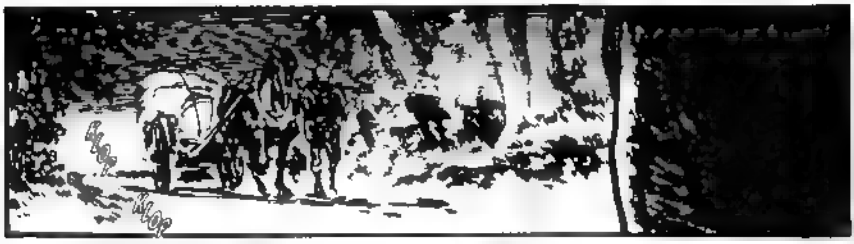




SPRING'S *ALMOST* HERE, BUT THE WIND'S STILL *CHILLY!* IT'S EASY TO CATCH *COLD* AFTER A BATH.

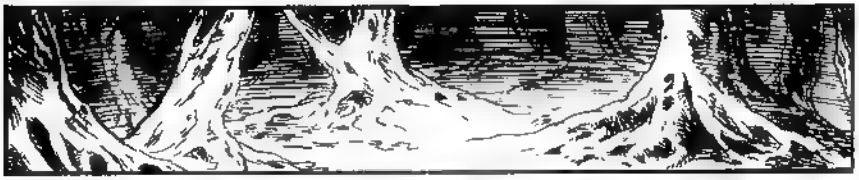






THIS WEAPON IS KNOWN AS THE *GAISHI-A* THE "BREAST CUTTER" BECAUSE IT IS FOUR *SHAKU* IN LENGTH—AS TALL AS A PERSON'S BREAST MADE OF OAK, WITH A TWO-PRONGED IRON SLEEVE AT MID-STAFF FOR CATCHING AND SNAPPING SWORD BLADES, AND A STAR SHAPED THROWING CLAW ATTACHED BY A LENGTHY CHAIN. A DEADLY WEAPON ADAPTED TO BOTH OFFENSE AND DEFENSE AND FAVORED BY *NINJA* SINCE THE *SENGOKU* ERA OF WARRING STATES.

SPREAD OUT!



KLOP KLOP

清義合
金達房

DEAR, DEAR!

I CAN'T BELIEVE I FORGOT T' GOT TO GO BACK!

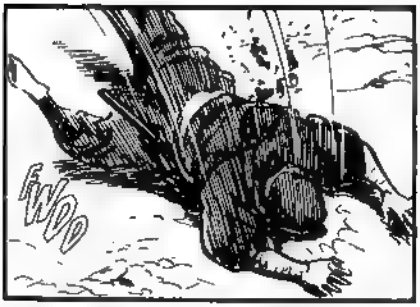
EH HEH HEH! LEFT SOMETHING BEHIND!
EXCUSE ME!

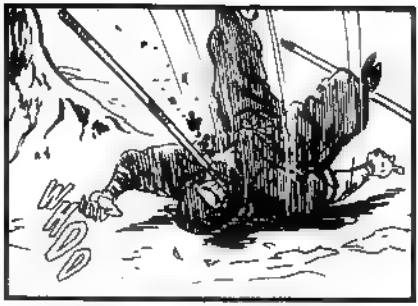
THERE'S A BAND OF STRANGE MEN, HIDING IN THE GROVE.
TWO IN THE BRANCHES, TWO BEHIND TREES, AT LEAST TWO MORE, FLAT ON THE GROUND

BE CAREFUL. IF YOU'RE THEIR TARGET, I'LL BE GLAD TO GIVE YOU BACKUP

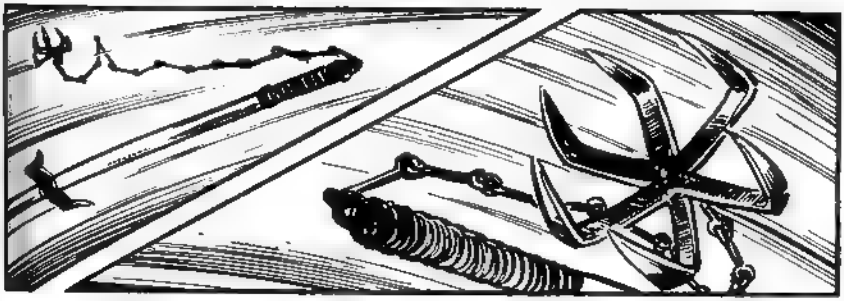
NO STAY OUT OF IT
....
....

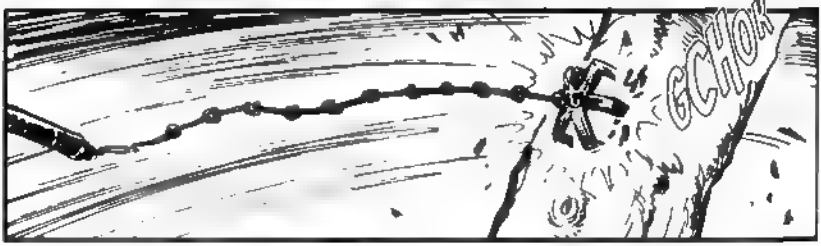
NNG!
SKLSSH


FWOO


WOO

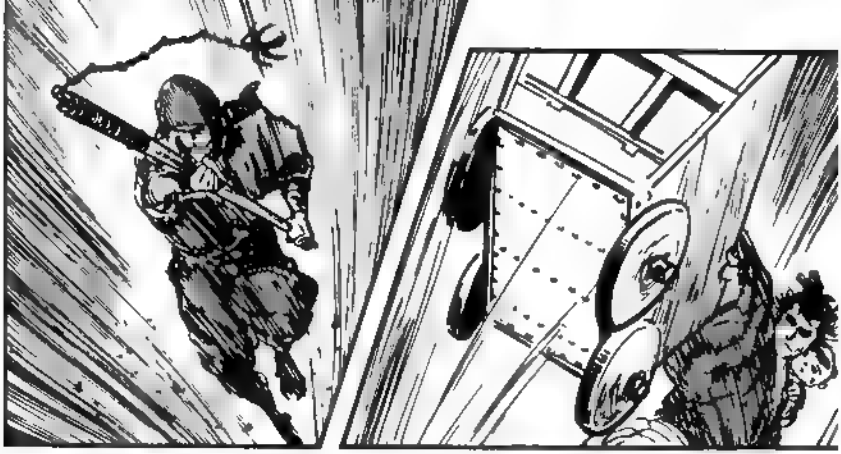
THP




GCHOK

GLKK!

DAIGORO!
PAPA!



SPANGG

SKSSSH
GAHH

WSSSHH

FLAK
SHAKK

PUHHT

GHFF!
KRAKK

WKK
WKK
WKK
WKK

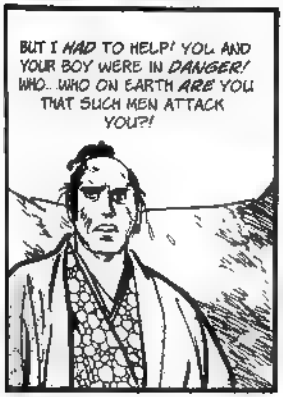
FWK
FWK

SHKK
SHKK

KIIAAA
.....
.....!

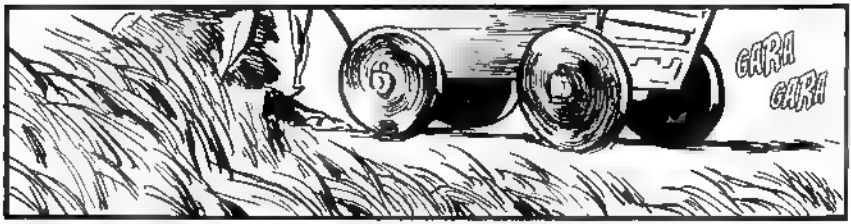
WHO IN THE NAME OF GOD ARE THEY?!
WHAT IS THAT BIZARRE WEAPON?

I TOLD YOU TO STAY OUT OF IT


BUT I HAD TO HELP! YOU AND YOUR BOY WERE IN DANGER! WHO... WHO ON EARTH ARE YOU THAT SUCH MEN ATTACK YOU?!

ŌGAMI ITTŌ, FORMER KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN! MY SON, DAIGORO! WE WALK THE DEMON PATH OF ASSASSINATION AS LONE WOLF AND CUB!
LONE WOLF ...?

GATA
GATA
GATA


GATA
GATA

IS IT REALLY OKAY? JUST LEAVING THEM LIKE THAT ?

WE SHOULD REPORT IT TO THE OFFICIALS AT THE NEXT MARKET TOWN OR WAY STATION.
. . . .
. . . .

MY GOD TO THINK THAT *YOU'RE* LONE WOLF AND CUB!

IT'S *AWFUL!* JUST *AWFUL!*

YOU AN *ASSASSIN?* WITH A *WONDERFUL* LITTLE BOY LIKE *HIM?*
ACCEPTING *MONEY* FOR *KILLING* PEOPLE. ?
I TOLD YOU TO STAY *OUT* OF IT!

I CAN'T DO THAT, SIR--I'VE KILLED A MAN! I'M REPORTING IT TO THE PROPER AUTHORITIES!
IT'S NOT YOUR CONCERN! AND BY NOW THE BODIES ARE GONE!

I TOLD YOU NOT TO GET INVOLVED!

OH. I SEE SO THAT'S IT THOSE MEN BACK THERE WERE FROM A SPECIAL OUTFIT O-NIWABAN, I IMAGINE. MOST LIKELY, KUROKUWA?

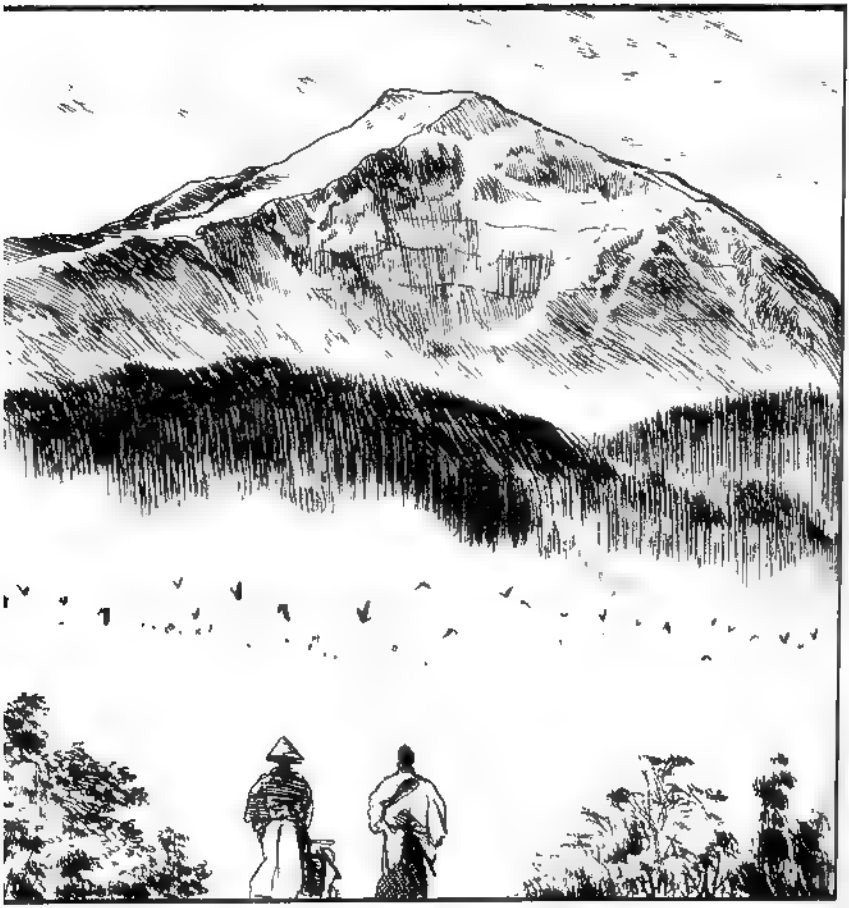
SURE, I'M JUST A SMALL FISH. BUT I STILL WORK FOR THE SHÔGUNATE! SO EVEN I KNOW THAT MUCH, SIR!
....
....

AND I'VE HEARD RUMORS ABOUT *LONE WOLF AND CUB*, TOO! IN FACT, I THINK I'VE EVEN HEARD OF *ŌGAMI ITTŌ-DONO* SOMEWHERE BEFORE.
YES! THAT'S *IT!* YOU HAD SOME *TROUBLE* WITH THE *YAGYŪ!!*

TOYAMA-DONO, YOU SAID?
YES. HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF *TOYAMA GEN'I?*

GEN'I-DONO OF THE KOSHIKAWA HOSPITAL?
THAT'S MY *DAD*. I'M HIS SECOND OLDEST SON. AND A *DOCTOR*, TOO. WELL, ALMOST

EVERYONE SAYS MY FATHER'S A GENIUS, BUT I'M NOT EVEN CLOSE. I'M STILL IN TRAINING.
. . . .
. . . .



THAT'S WHY I'M TRAVELING, IN FACT FOR MEDICINAL PLANTS! I'M GOING TO GATHER *IBUKI BOFU*!
....
....

IT LOOKS SORT OF LIKE A CARROT, BUT IT'S GREAT FOR GOUT, HELPS DIGESTION, BRINGS DOWN FEVER, EVEN CURES COLDS
YOU PICK THE ROOTS IN APRIL AND MAY, SECOND-YEAR GROWTH. DISCARD THE STEM, WASH IN FRESH WATER, AND DRY IN THE SUN.

AS YOU CAN GUESS FROM THE NAME, YOU FIND IT UP THERE, ON THE FLANKS OF MOUNT IBUKI.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS PATH OF SLAUGHTER?
.....

WELL, *WHATEVER* REASONS YOU HAD, THEY'RE *YOURS* AND NO ONE ELSE'S! CERTAINLY YOUR *BOY* COULDN'T CARE LESS! YOU MAY BE HIS *FATHER*, BUT THAT DOESN'T GIVE YOU THE RIGHT TO DRAG AN INNOCENT LITTLE CHILD THROUGH THE MUD!

SO *WHAT* IF YOU'RE BOUND BY BLOOD? YOU'RE STILL *INDIVIDUALS*—YOU LIVE YOUR OWN *LIVES*.

ISN'T THAT *SO?!*

JUST BECAUSE *YOU'VE* EATEN DOESN'T MEAN YOUR *BOY* HAS A FULL TUMMY

JUST BECAUSE *YOU* SLEPT WELL DOESN'T MEAN *HE* ISN'T SLEEPY

LIKE THEY SAY, WE SHIT AND PISS *ALONE*, SIR!

THE MOMENT WE'RE *BORN*, WE HAVE OUR OWN *PERSONALITIES*. OUR OWN RIGHT TO *LIFE!*

NO *FATHER* CAN STRIP THAT AWAY FROM HIS *CHILD!* IT'S *UNFORGIVABLE!*

. . . .
. . . .

ARE YOU EVEN *LISTENING* ?!

SAY SOMETHING, FOR GOD'S SAKE!

A FEW HOURS AGO YOU THREW YOUR DAGGER AND KILLED A HUMAN BEING

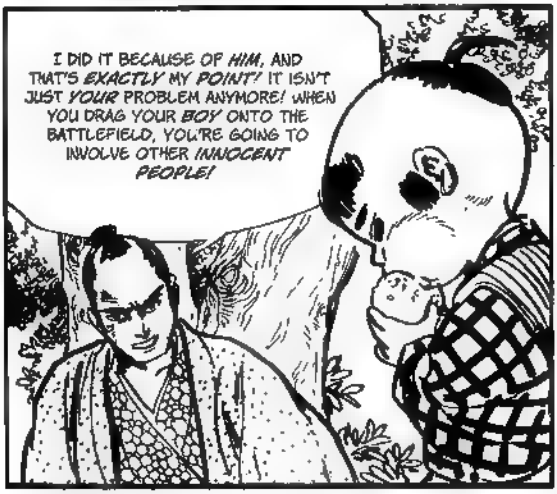
BY YOUR OWN ARGUMENT, YOU STOLE THAT MAN'S RIGHT TO LIFE.
IF YOU HAD BEEN ATTACKED, IF IT WAS KILL OR BE KILLED, THAT'S ONE THING. BUT INSTEAD

WHAT DID YOU SAY?!

YOU! A FATHER AND SON! YOU WERE UNDER ATTACK BY MYSTERIOUS ASSAILANTS!

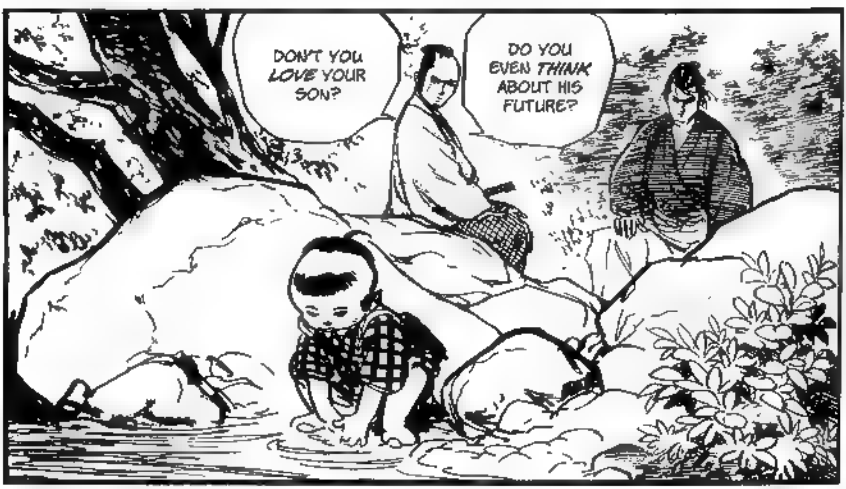
I WITNESSED IT!
YOU DON'T JUST WATCH A CHILD DROWNING IN THE RIVER! ANYONE WOULD HAVE HELPED!

ALTHOUGH TO BE HONEST, SIR, IF YOUR CHILD HADN'T BEEN THERE, MAYBE I WOULDN'T HAVE.
BEGGING YOUR PARDON, BUT WHO WOULD WANT TO GET MIXED UP WITH SOME SCRUFFY RŌNIN AND A BUNCH OF MYSTERY KILLERS?


I DID IT BECAUSE OF HIM, AND THAT'S EXACTLY MY POINT! IT ISN'T JUST YOUR PROBLEM ANYMORE! WHEN YOU DRAG YOUR BOY ONTO THE BATTLEFIELD, YOU'RE GOING TO INVOLVE OTHER INNOCENT PEOPLE!

THIS SWEET LITTLE CHILD

ANY-ONE WHO SAW HIM WOULD...
SCHLUCK


DON'T YOU LOVE YOUR SON?
DO YOU EVEN THINK ABOUT HIS FUTURE?

AS A FATHER AS A HUMAN BEING! THE PATH YOU'RE ON IS HERESY! YOU CAN'T SACRIFICE YOUR CHILD FOR YOUR OWN HATRED!
IF YOU HAVE TO WALK YOUR ROAD OF SLAUGHTER, WALK IT ALONE!
....
....

YOU SHOULD SET HIM FREE.

WE CHOSE THIS ROAD TOGETHER, FATHER AND SON. WE LIVE IN MEIFUMADŌ, ACCEPTING THE SUFFERING OF THE SIX PATHS AND THE FOUR LIVES.
YOU COULD NEVER UNDER-STAND.

YOU SAY HE CHOSE? HIMSELF? ABSURD . !

ENOUGH QUESTIONS.

. . . .
. . . .

I GOT MIXED UP WITH YOU TWO, AND I WOUND UP KILLING SOMEONE ME, A DOCTOR .

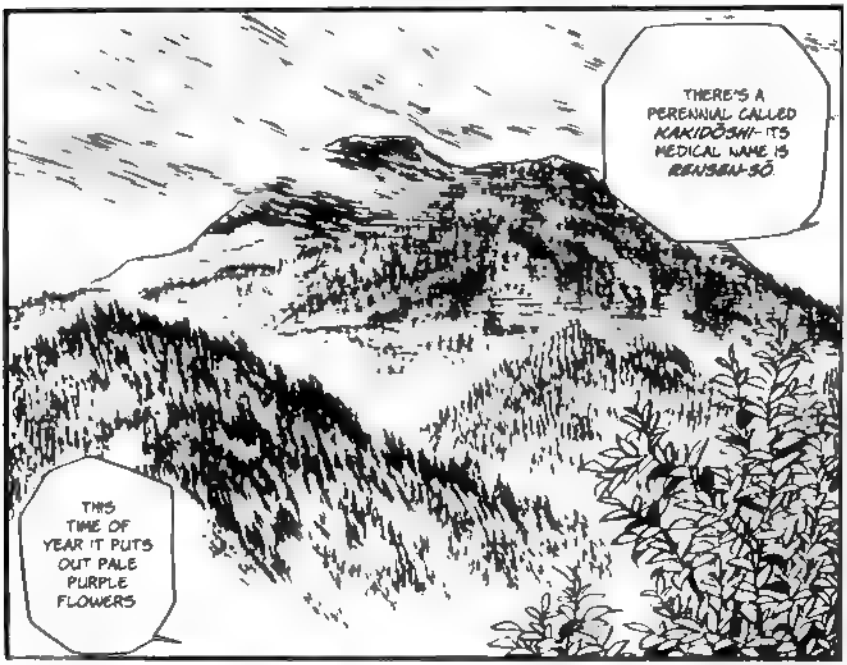
I THINK I DESERVE BETTER THAN "ENOUGH QUESTIONS"

THEN . I ACCEPT YOUR FEELINGS WITH GRATITUDE.

I SEE. WELL, LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHING. WHEN I WAS LITTLE, I DIDN'T *WANT* TO BE A DOCTOR. I DREAMED OF BEING SOME AMAZING *BUSHI*. I FLUNG MYSELF INTO MARTIAL ARTS, DAY AND NIGHT. BUT THAT'S THE FIRST TIME I'VE EVER *USED* THEM.
YET ISN'T TAKING A MAN'S LIFE, UNDER *ANY* CIRCUMSTANCES–
I SAID *NO MORE QUES-TIONS!*

SO BE IT

BUT AT LEAST REMEMBER THIS
MAYBE I'M STILL INTERFERING, BUT

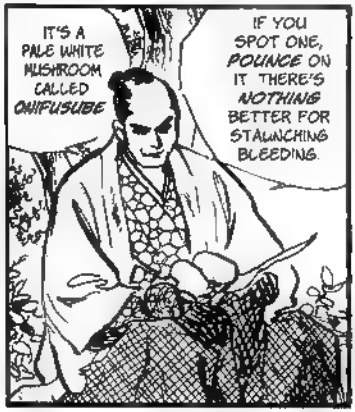

THERE'S A PERENNIAL CALLED KAKIDŌSHI— ITS MEDICAL NAME IS REUSEN-SŌ.
THIS TIME OF YEAR IT PUTS OUT PALE PURPLE FLOWERS

PERHAPS AROUND HERE.

AH— THERE'S ONE!

THIS IS *EXCELLENT* WHEN CHILDREN GET COLICKY
DRY IT IN A SHADED PLACE, WITH A GOOD BREEZE, AND GRIND IT FINE. THE POWDER WILL KEEP ITS HEALING POWERS FOR MANY YEARS

AND LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT AN EXCELLENT COAGULANT


IT'S A PALE WHITE MUSHROOM CALLED *ONIFUSUBE*
IF YOU SPOT ONE, *POUNCE* ON IT. THERE'S *NOTHING* BETTER FOR STAUNCHING BLEEDING.

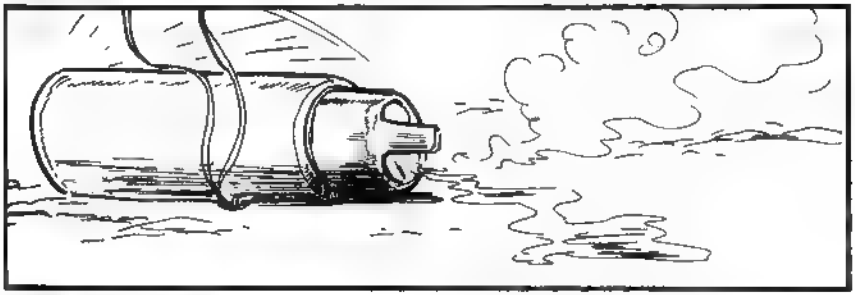
I'M NOT TELLING YOU THESE THINGS FOR *YOUR* BENEFIT. IT'S FOR THE *BOY*
....
....

HERE- I ALMOST FORGOT SOME TEA, PERHAPS?
AND IT'S HOT!

THIS IS MY OWN INVENTION

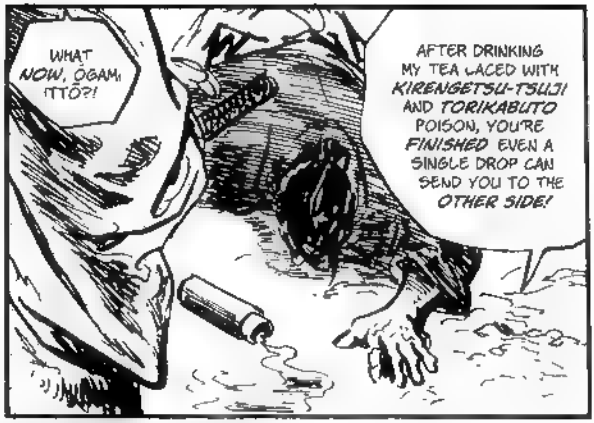
TAKE TWO NESTING SECTIONS OF BAMBOO, PACK THE GAP WITH CLAY

...AND YOU CAN HAVE HOT TEA WHENEVER YOU WANT!



KLONK

HEH HEH HEH. NO SWORDS NEEDED! INSINUATE YOUR WAY INTO YOUR OPPONENT'S HEART, WIN HIS TRUST AND THEN TAKE HIM OUT!
I PLANNED IT ALL—THE KUROKUWA AMBUSH, EVEN KILLING ONE OF THEM MYSELF, ALL TO TRAP YOU! THE YAGYÜ SHINKAGE SCHOOL OF YAMABIKO! THE ASSASSIN'S ECHO!


WHAT NOW, ŌGAMI ITTŌ?!
AFTER DRINKING MY TEA LACED WITH KIRENGETSU-TSUJI AND TORIKABUTO POISON, YOU'RE FINISHED EVEN A SINGLE DROP CAN SEND YOU TO THE OTHER SIDE!

HEH HEH HEH HEH!
YAGYŪ CLAN YAMABIKO, TOYAMA KIKUMA! I TAKE YOUR LIFE!

AH!

H-HOW ...?!
PTEW!

IM-IM-POSSIBLE! HOW DID YOU—
THE YAGYŪ ARE A CLAN OF ASSASSINS!
THEY'LL STOOP TO ANYTHING TO KILL THEIR ENEMIES. HOW MANY HIGH OFFICIALS HAVE DIED OF YOUR POISONS ALREADY ?

BUT . WHY WOULD YOU
I REMEMBERED, WHEN YOU STARTED TALKING ABOUT HERBS, THAT THERE'S A BRANCH OF THE YAGYŪ CALLED THE HYAKUSO-GUMI THE HUNDRED GRASSES! AND THAT THEY PRACTICE THE ART OF YAMABIKO!

YOU WERE A LITTLE TOO QUICK AT THE END, DON'T YOU THINK?

YOU SHOULD HAVE WAITED FOR THE ECHO BEFORE YOU GLOATED!

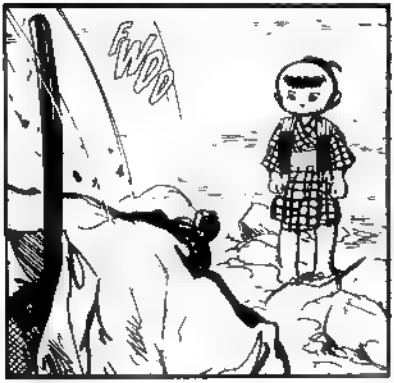
ARGH!

WHIIIIIP

KLANGG

SHNGG
SLPCCH

NEGR !


EWW

I I WASN'T LYING.

YES. I WANTED YOU TO TRUST ME, BUT .MY WORDS.. ALL TRUE!
I WORRY FOR YOUR BOY AFTER YOU'RE GONE .AS ONE HUMAN BEING FOR ANOTHER.

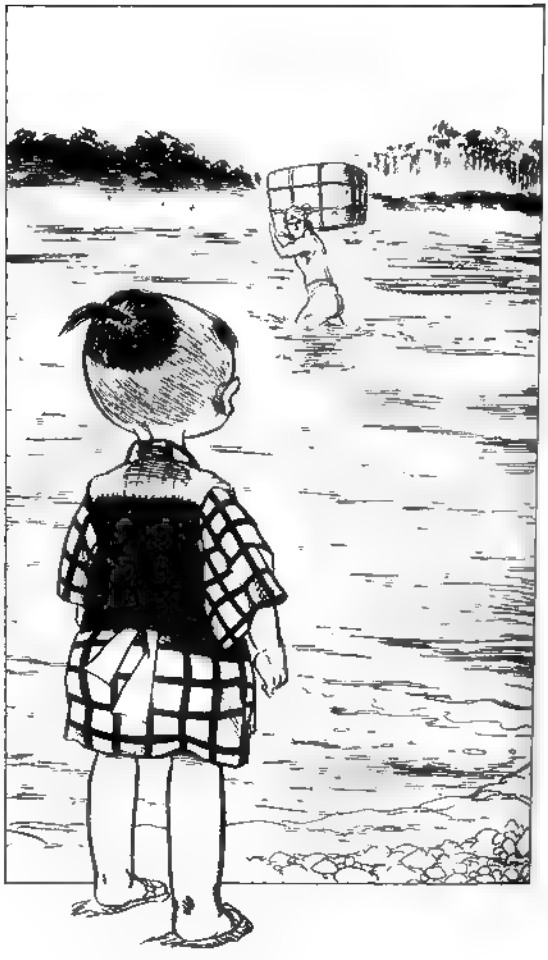
I I TRULY WANTED TO BE A DOCTOR!
BUT I WAS BORN YAGYU SO IT WASN'T TO BE.

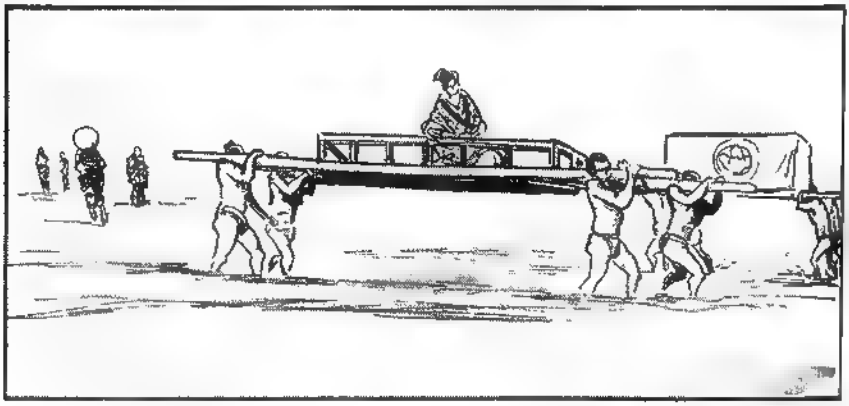
HEH. A MAN'S LIFE. A BITTER JOKE.
I'LL TEACH YOU ONE LAST THING.
EAT THAT KAKIDŌSHI!

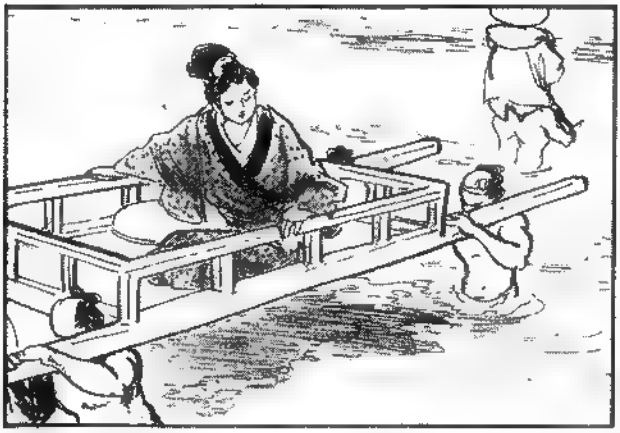
IT .IT'S AN ANTIDOTE EVEN SPITTING OUT . THE TEA..
THE POISONS WILL..

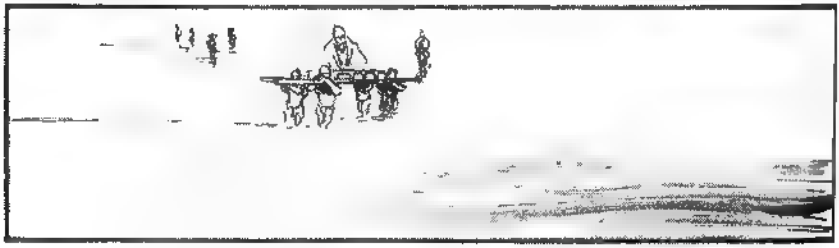
the forty-eighth

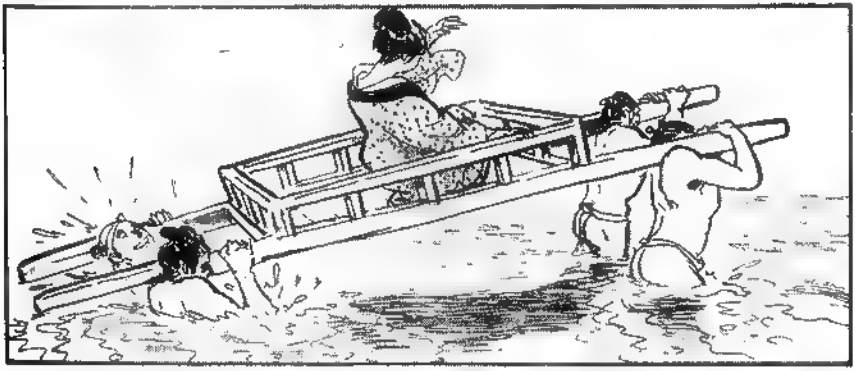
Naked Worms









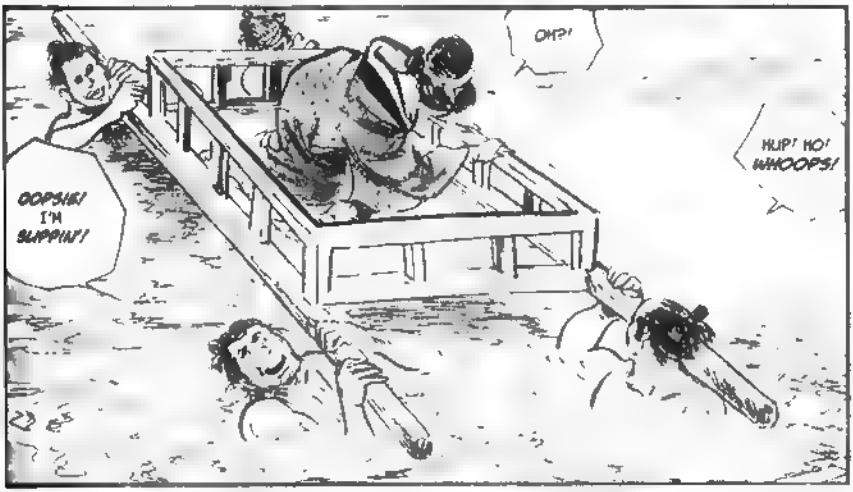


EH HEH HEH. HEY, GO-SHINZO-SAN! IT'S DAMN DANGEROUS T' KNEEL ON THE RENDA!! YA BETTER CROSS THEM LEGS!

IF YER LEGS FALL ASLEEP AND SOMETHIN' HAPPENS, Y' COULD DROWN! SEE? MAKE YERSELF COMFY, THAT'S HOW YA CROSS A RIVER.

FIRST TIME ON A *REUNION*, I BETCHA?
SO YA BETTER LISTEN TO *US!*

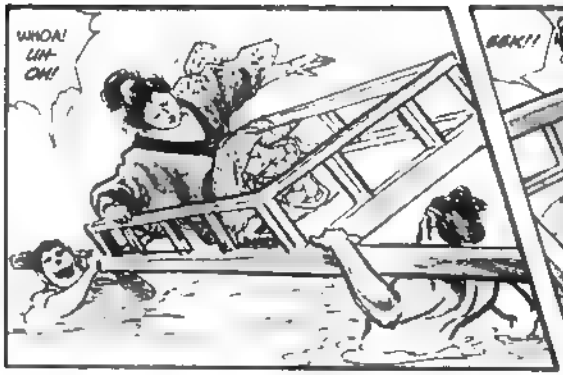
B-BUT IT'S NOT


OOPSIE! I'M *SLIPPIN'!*
OH?!
HUP! HO! *WHOOPS!*

I'LL. I'LL.

GIVE YOU *DRINKING MONEY!*

THAT'S RIGHT *GENEROUS* MA'AM, AND I'M SURE YA WILL. BUT IF YA DON'T CROSS THEM *LEGS RIGHT QUICK* DUNNO F WE KIN GET YA TO THE OTHER SIDE!

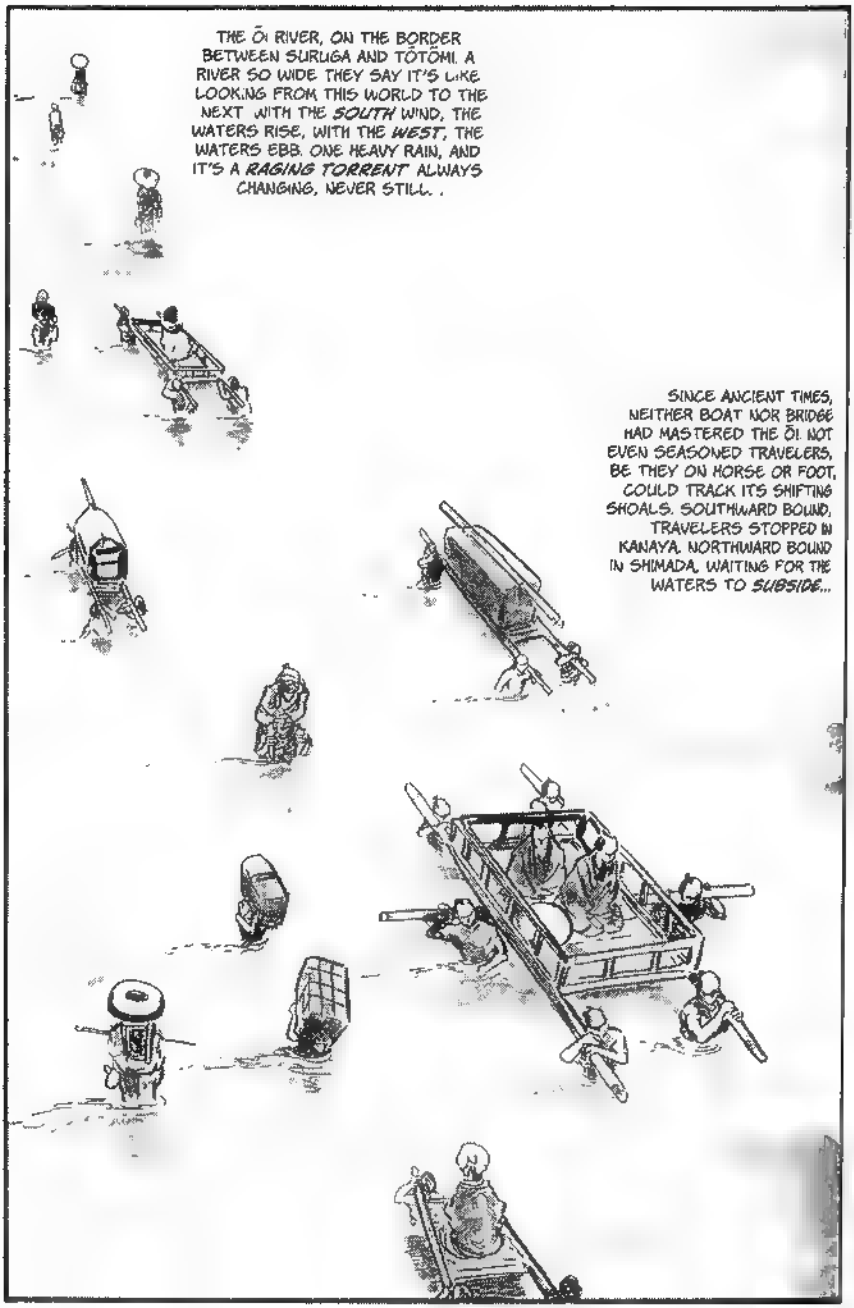

WHOA! UH-OH!

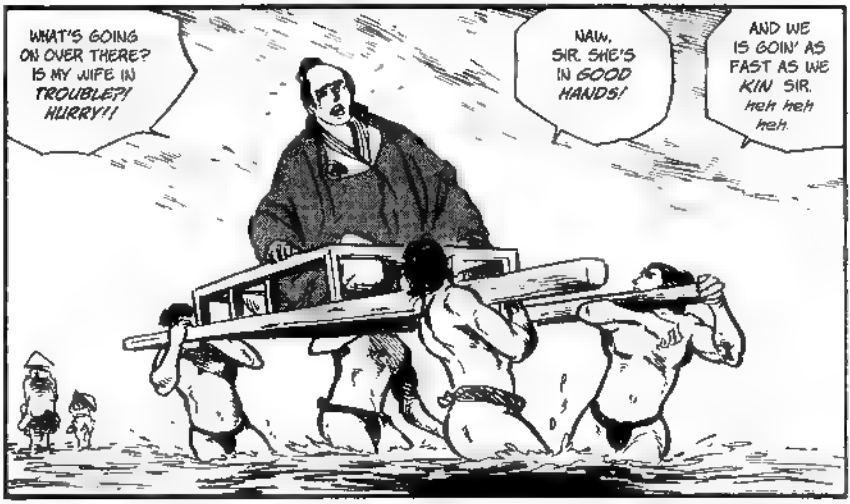
EEK!!

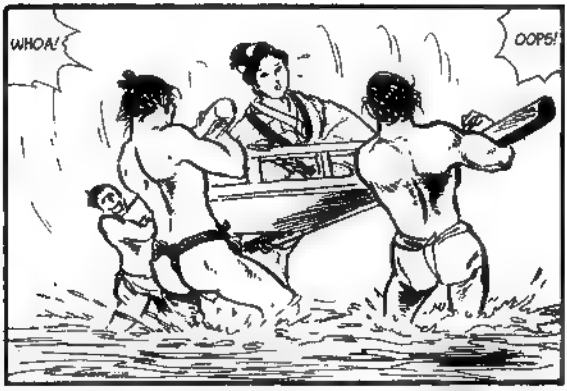
YEAH! THERE YA GO!

NOW S-STOP IT!
IT'S... DANGER-OUS!

C'MON, GO-SHINZO-SAN! SPREAD 'EM SO WE CAN SEE SOME HAIR UP THERE!
WH. WHAT ?!
HEH HEH. WE HADAKA-MUSHI GOT OUR RIGHTS, SEE?
THE RIVER GOT ITS WAYS .WOMEN WHAT KNOW 'EM LET US "PRAY AT THE ALTAR" WITHOUT US EVEN ASKIN'!
Y-YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS!


THE ŌI RIVER, ON THE BORDER BETWEEN SURUGA AND TŌTŌMI. A RIVER SO WIDE THEY SAY IT'S LIKE LOOKING FROM THIS WORLD TO THE NEXT. WITH THE *SOUTH* WIND, THE WATERS RISE, WITH THE *WEST*, THE WATERS EBB. ONE HEAVY RAIN, AND IT'S A *RAGING TORRENT* ALWAYS CHANGING, NEVER STILL. .
SINCE ANCIENT TIMES, NEITHER BOAT NOR BRIDGE HAD MASTERED THE ŌI. NOT EVEN SEASONED TRAVELERS, BE THEY ON HORSE OR FOOT, COULD TRACK ITS SHIFTING SHOALS. SOUTHWARD BOUND, TRAVELERS STOPPED IN KANAYA. NORTHWARD BOUND IN SHIMADA, WAITING FOR THE WATERS TO *SUBSIDE*...


WHAT'S GOING ON OVER THERE? IS MY WIFE IN TROUBLE?! HURRY!!
NAW, SIR. SHE'S IN GOOD HANDS!
AND WE IS GOIN' AS FAST AS WE KIN SIR. heh heh heh.


WHOA!
OOPS!

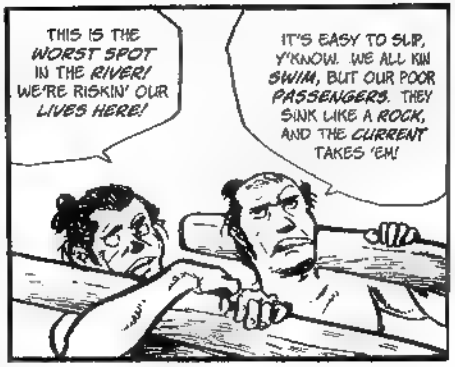
C'MON, GO-SHINZO-SAN!

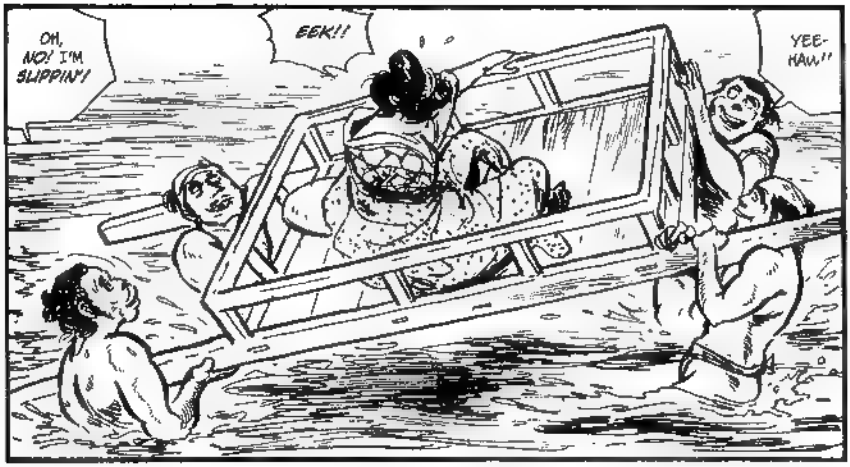
IT DON'T WEAR OUT WITH LOOK-IN'!

DON'TCHA SHOW YOUR HUBBY EVERY NIGHT?

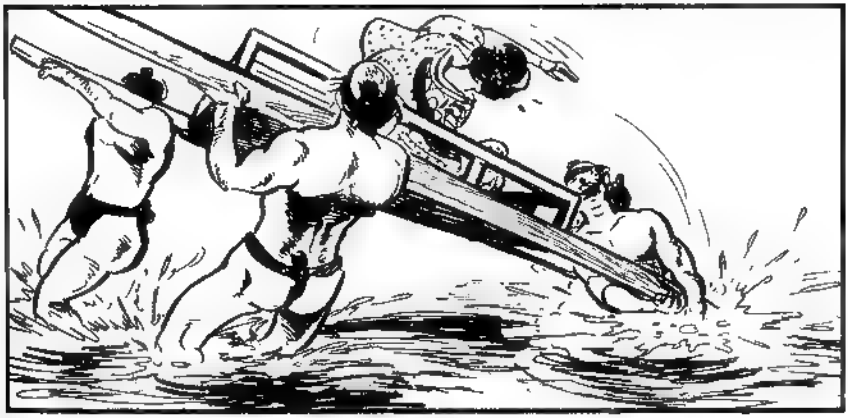
SHARE THE WEALTH WITH US POOR FOLK, MA AM! heh heh!

.....!


THIS IS THE WORST SPOT IN THE RIVER! WE'RE RISKIN' OUR LIVES HERE!
IT'S EASY TO SLIP, Y'KNOW. WE ALL KIN SWIM, BUT OUR POOR PASSENGERS. THEY SINK LIKE A ROCK, AND THE CURRENT TAKES 'EM!


OH, NO! I'M SLIPPIN'!
EEK!!
YEE-HAW!!

WHOA! HO!
AH?!
EEK!



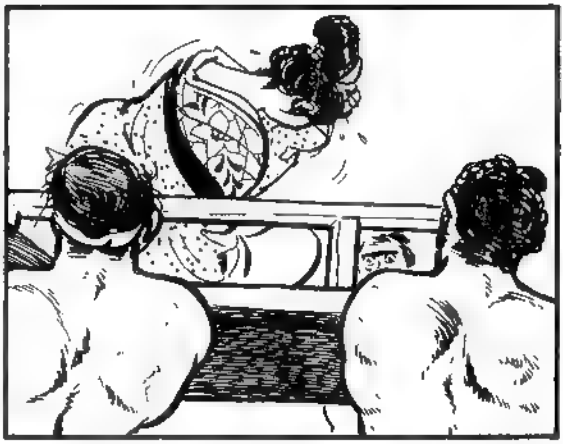
SSSSHH

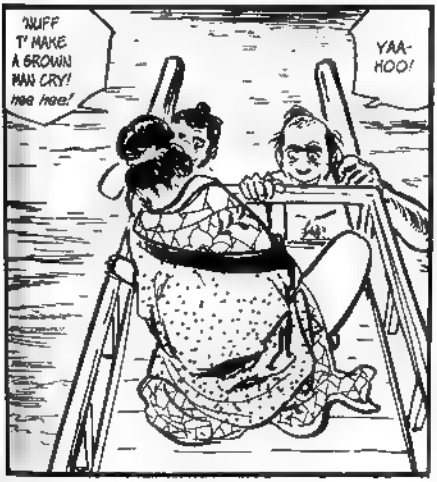
....
....

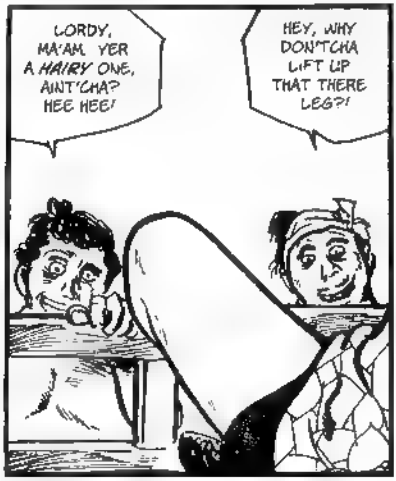
SNIFF!

WHY, HELLO!
BARELY BEEN USED! MAKES YA WANNA TAKE A BIG, JUICY BITE!
YO-HO-HO!

HEY! MY TURN!
OUR TURN!
C'MON- GET IT AROUND THIS WAY, MA'AM!




'NUFF T' MAKE A BROWN MAN CRY! hee hee!
YAA-HOO!


LORDY, MA'AM. YER A HAIRY ONE, AINT'CHA? HEE HEE!
HEY, WHY DON'TCHA LIFT UP THAT THERE LEG?!

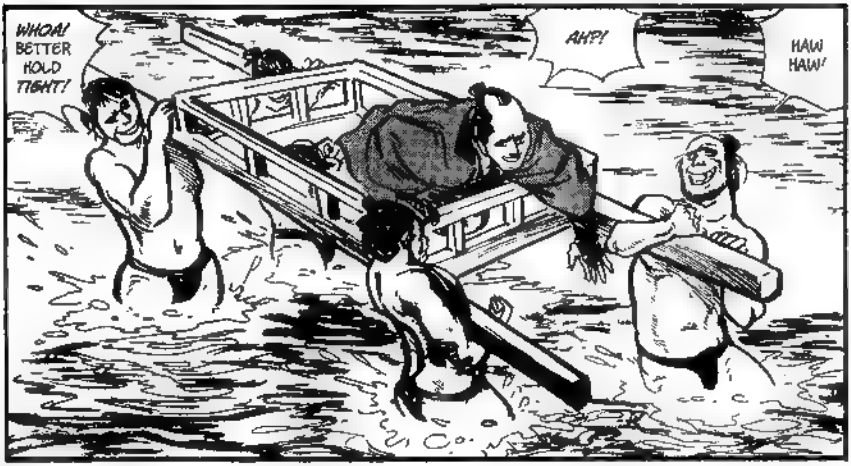
ALL RIGHT!
BWA HAW HAW!
OH, BABY! YEAH!

WHAT THE DEVIL IS GOING ON OVER THERE?!
O-SHIZU !!

HEY, CALM DOWN, PAL!
YEAH. TAKE OR LEAVE IT, TH' RIVER'S GOT ITS RULES

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, RULES?!
THAT IS A SIMPLE OUT-RAGE!

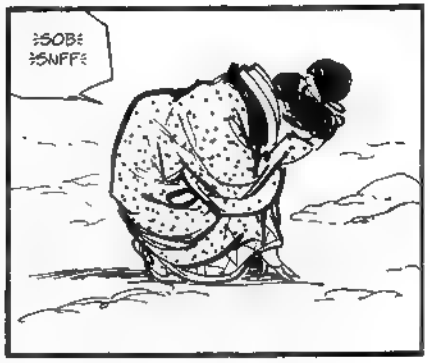
YER LITTLE LADY'S TOO PERTY FOR HER OWN GOOD!

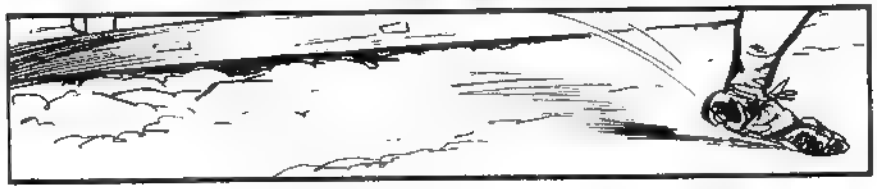

WHOA! BETTER HOLD TIGHT!
AH?!
HAW HAW!

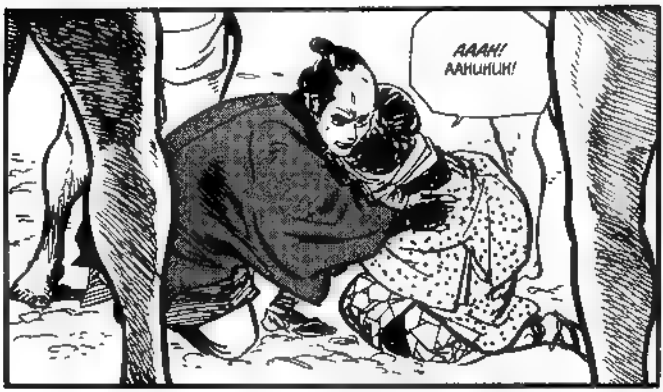
IN THOSE DAYS THE SHŌGUNATE MAINTAINED *SEKISHO* CHECKPOINTS ON CRITICAL THOROUGHFARES, AND RELIED ON FERRY BOATS AND RIVER LABORERS FOR CROSSING THE NATION'S MANY RIVERS. IN PART IT WAS BECAUSE BRIDGE-BUILDING TECHNOLOGY WAS TOO PRIMITIVE FOR SUCH POWERFUL CURRENTS; IN PART A DELIBERATE POLICY, DESIGNED TO HINDER SURPRISE ATTACKS ON EDO.

AND SO THE RIVER LABORERS BECAME THE BANE OF EVERY TRAVELER. CURSED AS *HADAKA-MUSHI*—"NAKED WORMS"—THEY WERE NOTORIOUS FOR EXTORTING TIPS, AND FORCING FEMALE PASSENGERS TO EXPOSE THEMSELVES OR SUBMIT TO HUMILIATING FONDLING. COUNTLESS TRAVEL RECORDS SPEAK OF THEIR ABUSES AGAINST WOMEN.

THE *HADAKA-MUSHI* SYSTEM LASTED WELL INTO THE MEIJI PERIOD (1868-1892) AND JAPAN'S OPENING TO THE WEST. EVEN ON THE ROKUGŌ RIVER NEAR MODERN TOKYO, THERE WERE NO BRIDGES BUILT UNTIL 1867.






AAAH! AAHUHUH!

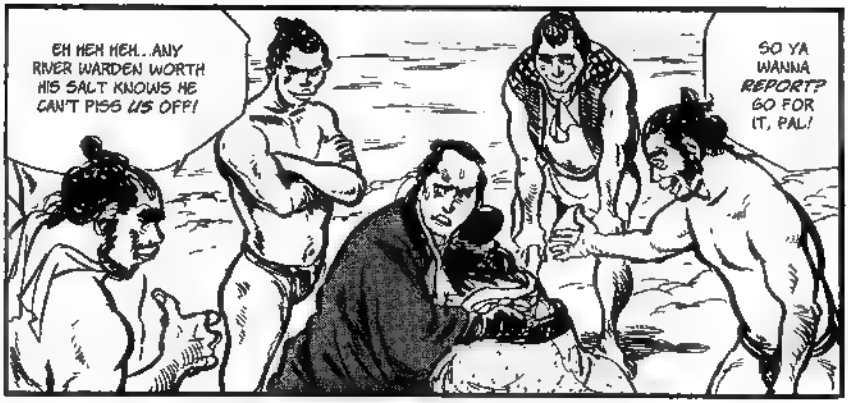
YOU BASTARDS!! H-HOW DARE YOU!

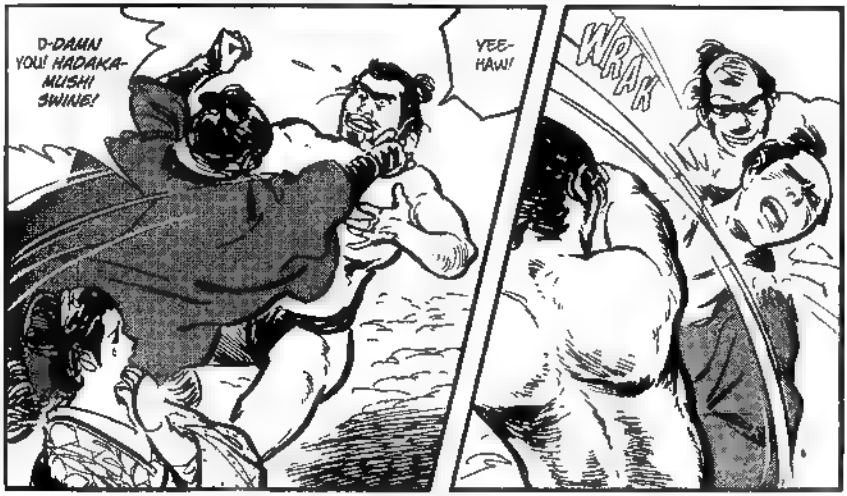
I'M REPORTING YOU TO THE RIVER WARDEN! YOU'LL PAY!

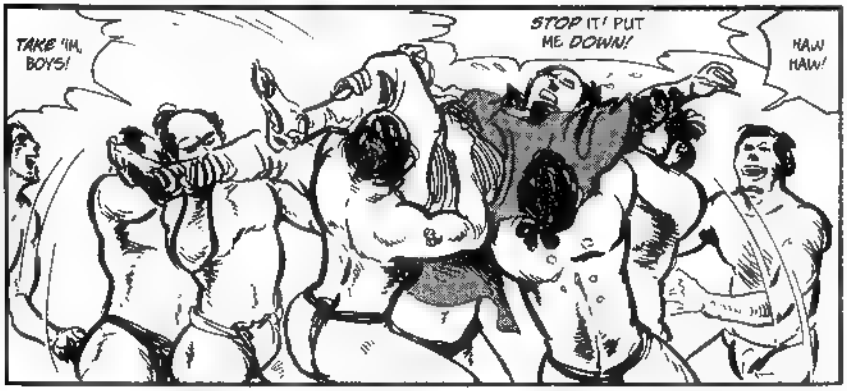
HEAR THAT, BOYS? HE'S GONNA REPORT US!
GO ON! HELP YER-SELF!

THE RIVER WARDEN LISTENS TO US, SEE?!
YA KNOW WHAT A RIVER WARDEN DOES?

HE MAKES SURE THE BIG SHOTS' MAIL GETS ACROSS THE RIVER IN THE GOJO-BAKO AND ON TO EDO, THAT'S WHAT!
IF HE CAN'T GET US TO TAKE IT ACROSS, THEN WHAT, HUH?


EH HEH HEH..ANY RIVER WARDEN WORTH HIS SALT KNOWS HE CAN'T PISS US OFF!
SO YA WANNA REPORT? GO FOR IT, PAL!


D-DAMN YOU! HADAKA-MUSHI SWINE!
YEE-HAW!
WRAK


TAKE 'IM, BOYS!
STOP IT! PUT ME DOWN!
HAW HAW!

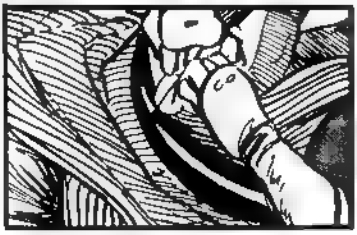
PARTY TIME!
EEEK!

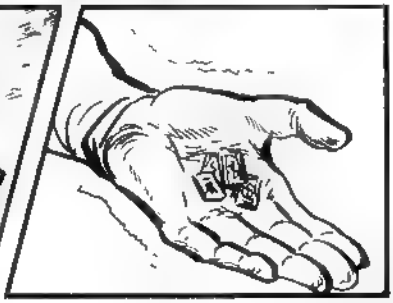
HEY NO KICKIN' SIR! WE MIGHT DROP YA!
WH-WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?!
YO HO!
WHOA! WATCH IT!

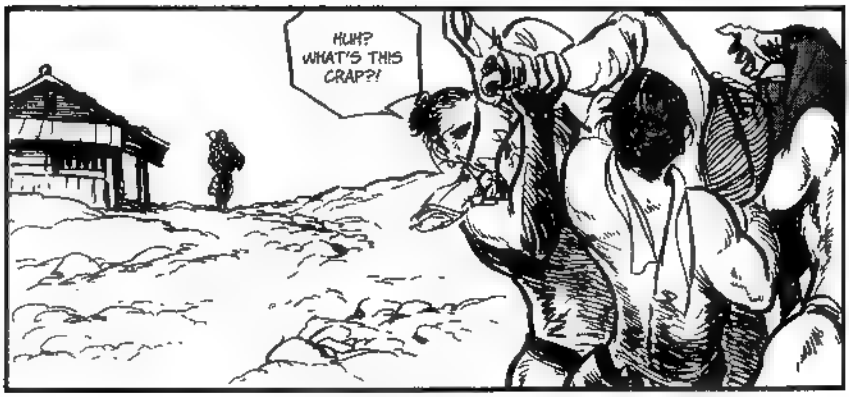
BWA HAW HAW!
HEAVE HO! HEAVE HO!

HUP NO! HUP NO!
STOP IT! STOP IT, I SAY!
UH-OH! THINK I'M SLIPPIN'!

HOW 'BOUT A TIP, SIR? OR SHALL WE DUMP YA IN THE DEEPS?!






HUH? WHAT'S THIS CRAP?!

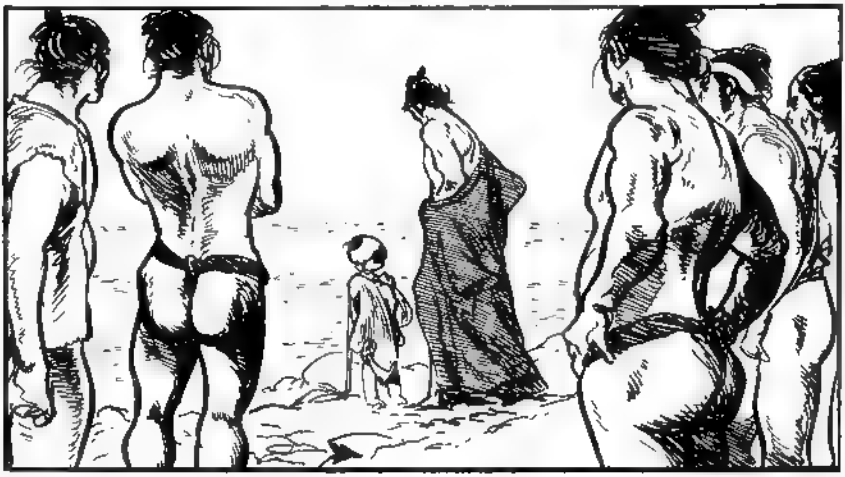
A WHOLE BU! NOW THAT'S MORE LIKE IT!

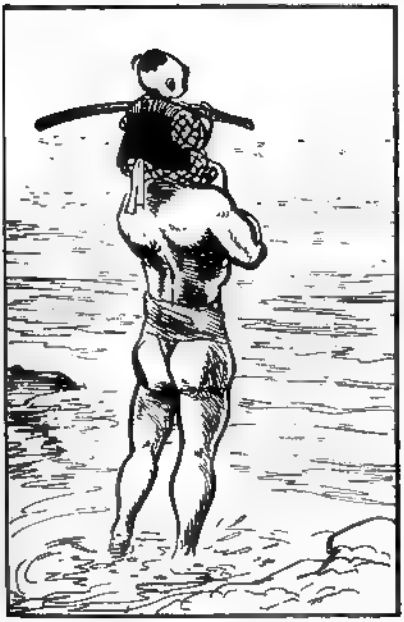
YO, BOYS! THANK THE GENTLEMAN!
JUST PUT HE DOWN!!

HEH, HEH. THANKEE KINDLY, SIR!
Y'ALL HAVE A GREAT TRIP!

BWA HAW HAW!
LOOKIT 'EM RUN!

MUH ?
....
....
HEY!





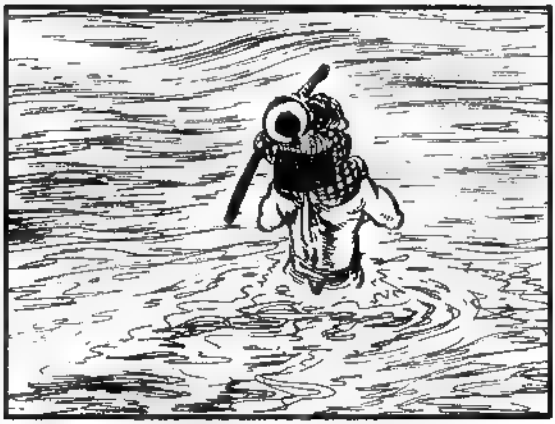
THAT BASSUD! WHAT'S *HE* THINK HE'S DOIN'?!
HE'S STEAL'N' OUR *JOBS*, THAT TURD!

HOLD IT *HOLD* IT!

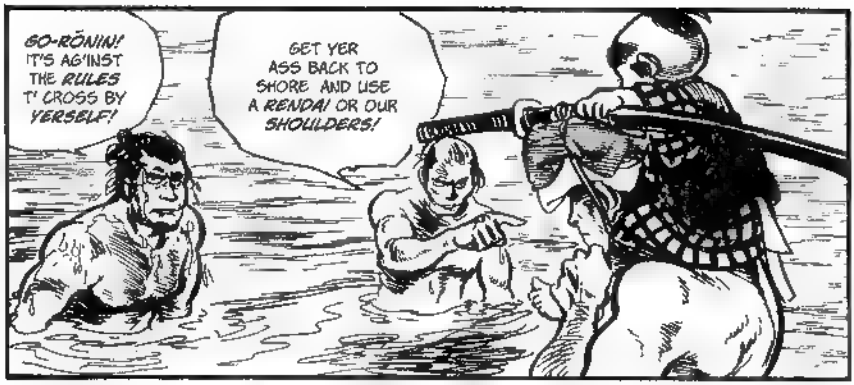
EVEN A STARVIN' DOG'S GOT TEETH.
PLAY THIS WRONG, AND WE COULD GET THE CHOP!
YEAH !

WAIT UNTIL HE'S IN THE DEEPEST STRETCH.
ONCE HE'S IN THE RIVER .HE'S OURS.
GOTCHA, BOSS!

SSSS!
SSSS!



SKSSH
SKSSH
BSSH
SKSSH
SPSSH
SLOSSH


GO-RŌNIN! IT'S AG'INST THE RULES T' CROSS BY YERSELF!
GET YER ASS BACK TO SHORE AND USE A RENDA! OR OUR SHOULDERS!

....
....

THAT SORTA THING IS BAD FOR BUSINESS, SEE?
YEAH! WE'RE OUT HERE NIGHT 'N' DAY, WALKIN' THE RAPIDS, FINDIN' WHERE IT'S SAFE TO CROSS!

THE RIVER'S CHANGIN' ALL TH' TIME, Y'SEE?! YA CAN'T JUST MOSEY ACROSS AFTER WE'VE DONE THE DANGEROUS WORK!
'SIDES, IF EVERYONE TRIES CROSSIN' LIKE YOU, HOW IS WE GONNA EAT?!

AND DON'T SAY YA DON'T GOT NO DOUGH! NOT WHEN YA GOT THAT FANCY CHOPPER!

IF YA GOTTA CROSS BY YERSELF, GO DOWN-STREAM!
OF COURSE, IT'S SO DEEP YOU GOTTA SWIM!
WELL?!

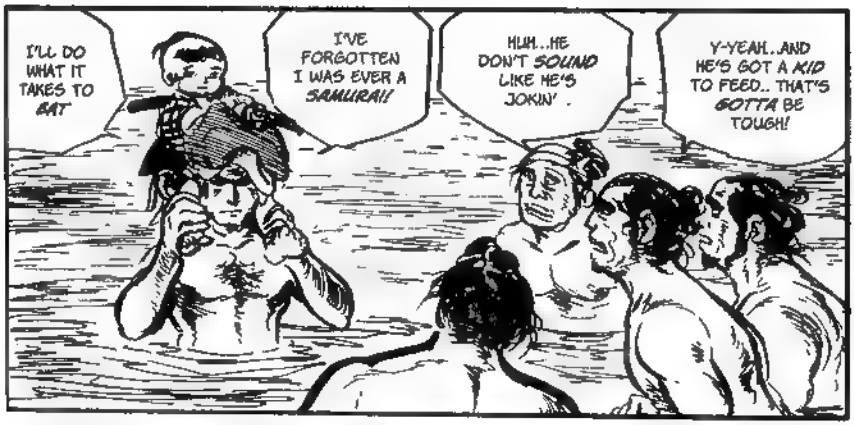
I'M NOT TRYING TO CROSS.
HUH?!

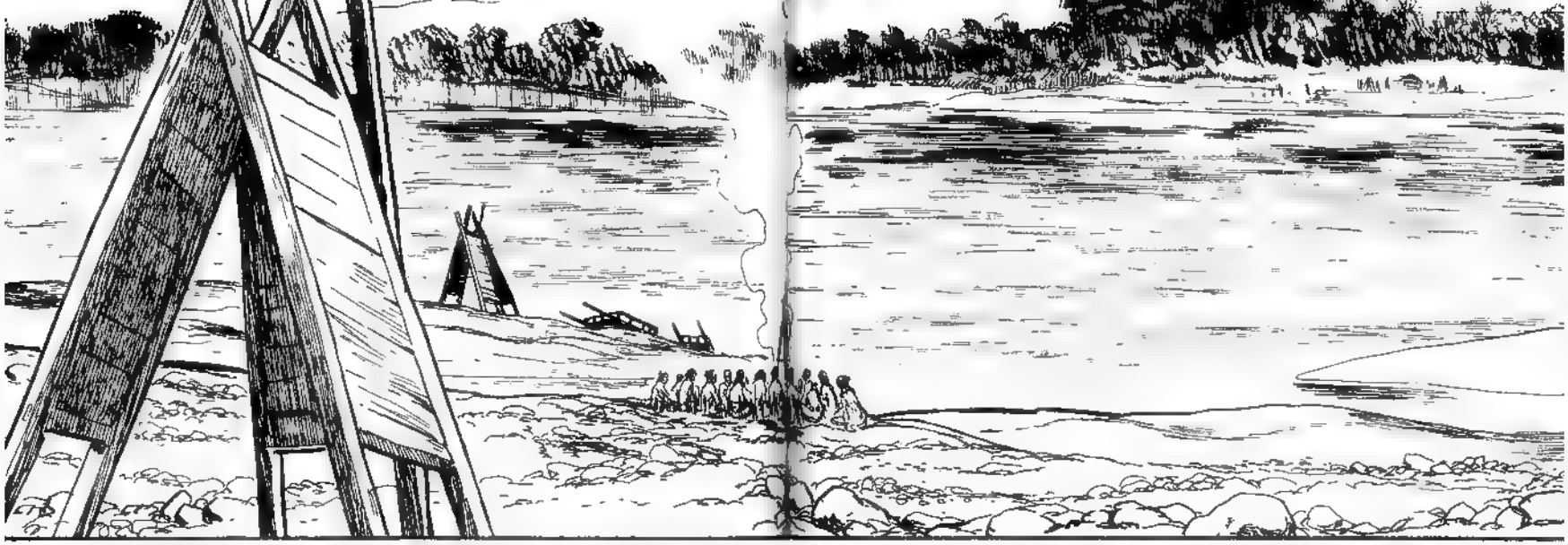
I'M SEEING IF I CAN BE A HADAKA-MUSHI.

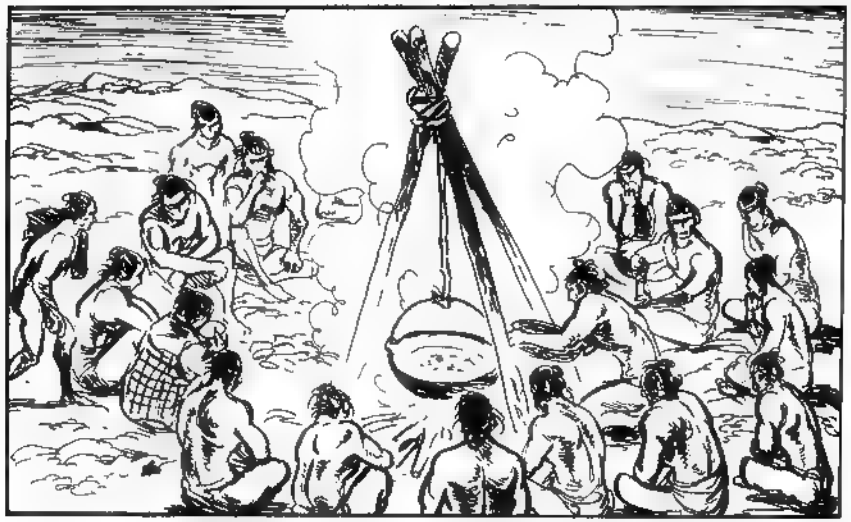
ARE YOU. . HUH?!

I'M SERIOUS
SO... WILL YOU LET ME JOIN?!

ARE...ARE YOU CRAZY? A SAMURAI CAN'T CARRY PEASANTS AND TOWN FOLK ON HIS BACK!


I'LL DO WHAT IT TAKES TO EAT
I'VE FORGOTTEN I WAS EVER A SAMURAI!
HUH...HE DON'T SOUND LIKE HE'S JOKIN'.
Y-YEAH..AND HE'S GOT A KID TO FEED.. THAT'S GOTTA BE TOUGH!





CHOMP
CHOMP
MASCH
MASCH

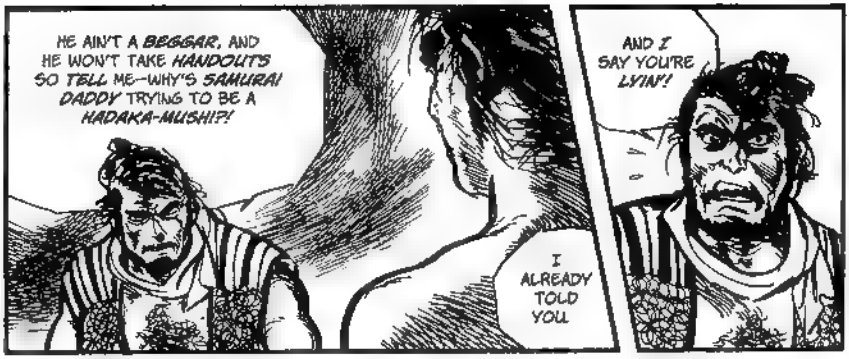
MNCH
MNCH
GUP

MUCH
SLRP
CHOMP

SLRP
SLRP

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YA ATE?
EIGHT THIS MORNING.
HMM.
GIVE THE KID SOME GRUB!
YASSIR!

AIN'T SCARED A'TALL, ARE YA, KID?
HERE YA GO!
C'MON, KID! EAT!
IF YA AIN'T HAD NOTHIN' SINCE MORNIN', THAT MEANS YA AIN'T ET ALL DAY! YA OUGHTTA BE STARVIN'!
HUH! WEIRD LITTLE BRAT!
I THOUGHT SO! ANY NORMAL KID WOULD WATCH THET FOOD LIKE A HAWK BUT NOT HIM! HE MAY BE DOWN AN' OUT, BUT ONCE A SAMURAI, ALWAYS A SAMURAI! TH' KID'S CENTERED! HE'S GOT THAT DISCIPLINE GOIN'!


HE AIN'T A BEGGAR, AND HE WON'T TAKE HANDOUTS SO TELL ME—WHY'S SAMURAI DADDY TRYING TO BE A HADAKA-MUSHI?!
I ALREADY TOLD YOU.
AND I SAY YOU'RE LYIN'!

SURE, WE GET GUYS BEGGIN' TO BE HADAKA-MUSHI DOWN AND OUT ON THE SKIDS! YA CAN SEE 'EM DROOL WHEN WE EAT.
BUT YOU AND YOUR BRAT DON'T SHOW NOTHIN'!

DADDY CAN ACT TOUGH. BUT KIDS ARE HONEST. IF THEY'RE HUNGRY, THEY EAT!

KNOW THE CHILD, KNOW THE PARENT! THIS KID'S DAD MUST BE ONE TOUGH SUNUVA-BITCH OF A SAMURAI!

YEAH. THERE'S SOMETHIN' SPECIAL ABOUT YOU, PAL!
DON'T THINK YOU CAN PUT ONE OVER ON THE HADAKA-MUSHI! SPRING, SUMMER, FALL, WINTER, WE'RE OUT HERE BUCK NAKED, LIVIN' ON THE EDGE!

SO WE KNOW HOW TH' WORLD WORKS WE KIN SEE RIGHT THROUGH THEM BASTARDS WE CARRY ON OUR BACKS!
NO WAY YOU'RE SOME BEGGAR RŌNIN! I DON'T EVEN THINK YOU'RE HUNGRY!

SO-- WHY A HADAKA-MUSHI?!
TELL ME STRAIGHT, AND MAYBE.
SO WE CAN LIVE, FATHER AND SON. NO OTHER REASON.

YO, BOYS! DO WE LET HIM IN?!

OR DO WE KICK HIS ASS? WHICH?!

I'M AG'INST IT, BOSS! THIS AN'T THE KIND'A WORK HE KIN HACK WITH THEM TWO SWORDS OF HIS! HE'LL JES' SLACK OFF AN' CAUSE TROUBLE!

WE CAIN'T GET ALONG WITH HIS TYPE!
DAMN STRAIGHT! HE WON'T PLAY TH' GAME, SEE?
WE MAKE OUR LIVIN' RIPPIN' OFF CUSTOMERS, RIGHT?! BUT LOOKIT IM! HIS ASS IS SO TIGHT IT'S CRACKIN' CHESTNUTS!

WHAT DOES JIDANDA THE BOSS-MAN SAY?
I SAY WE TAKE HIM.

HUH?!
ARE YOU KIDDIN'..

I SAY WE TAKE HIM!!

Y-YASSIR ...!
S-SURE B-BOSS!
YEAH, IF JIDANDA SAYS SO WE DON'T MIND!
NO, SIRREE. NOT US!

THEN IT'S DECIDED YOU START TOMORROW!

UNDER-STOOD

I'M JIDANDA KARIZÔ

BOSS OF THE *HADAKA-MUSHI*

AND I'M-

NAW DON'T NEED TO KNOW.

FROM NOW ON, YOU'RE CALLED "THE *BABY-SITTER*."

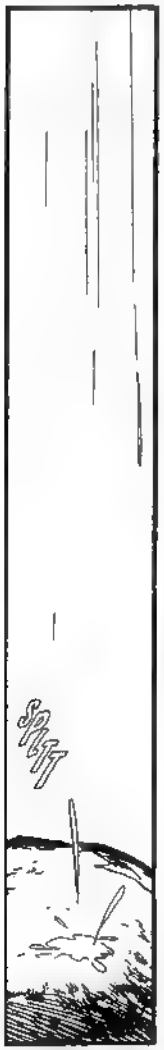
GOT THAT, BOYS?!

FROM NOW ON *THE BABYSITTER'S* ONE OF *US!* TEACH HIM ALL YA KNOW!

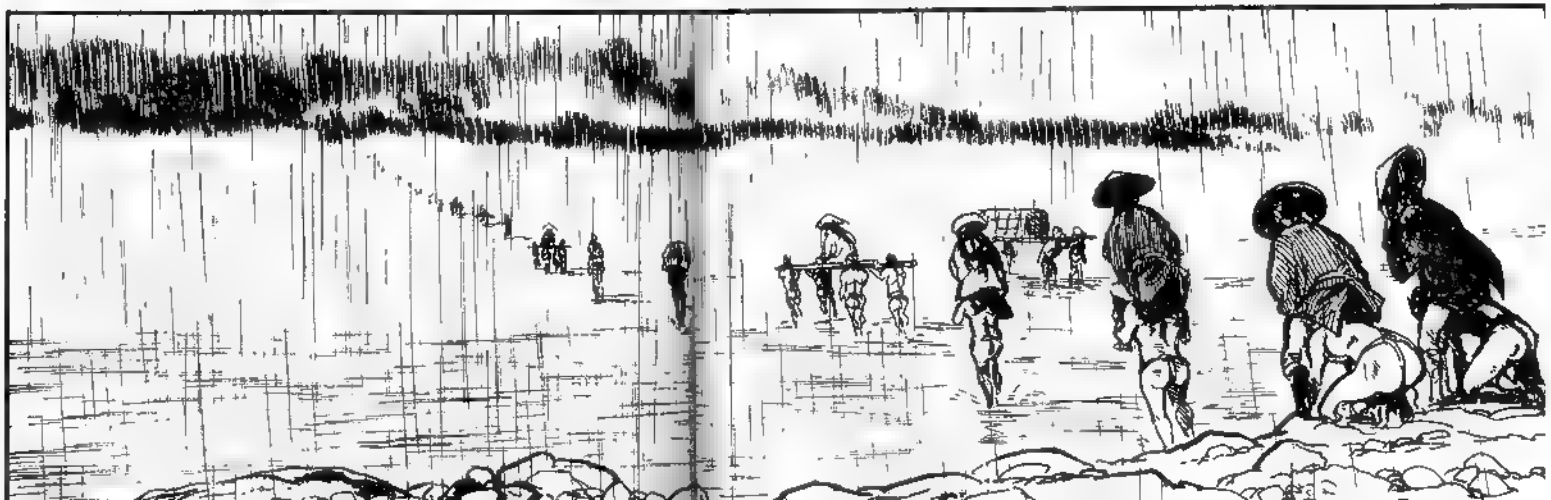
YASSIR!

AND TAKE TURNS WATCHING THE *KID!* GOT IT?!

YASSIR!



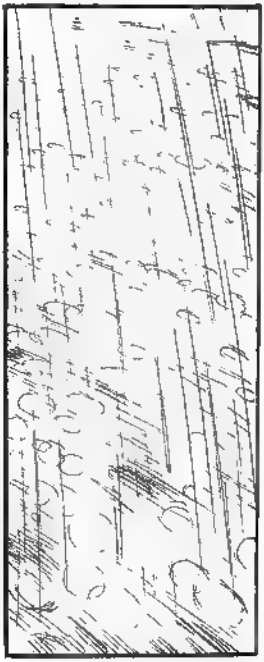
RAINY SEASON'S COMIN' ON EARLY DAMN!



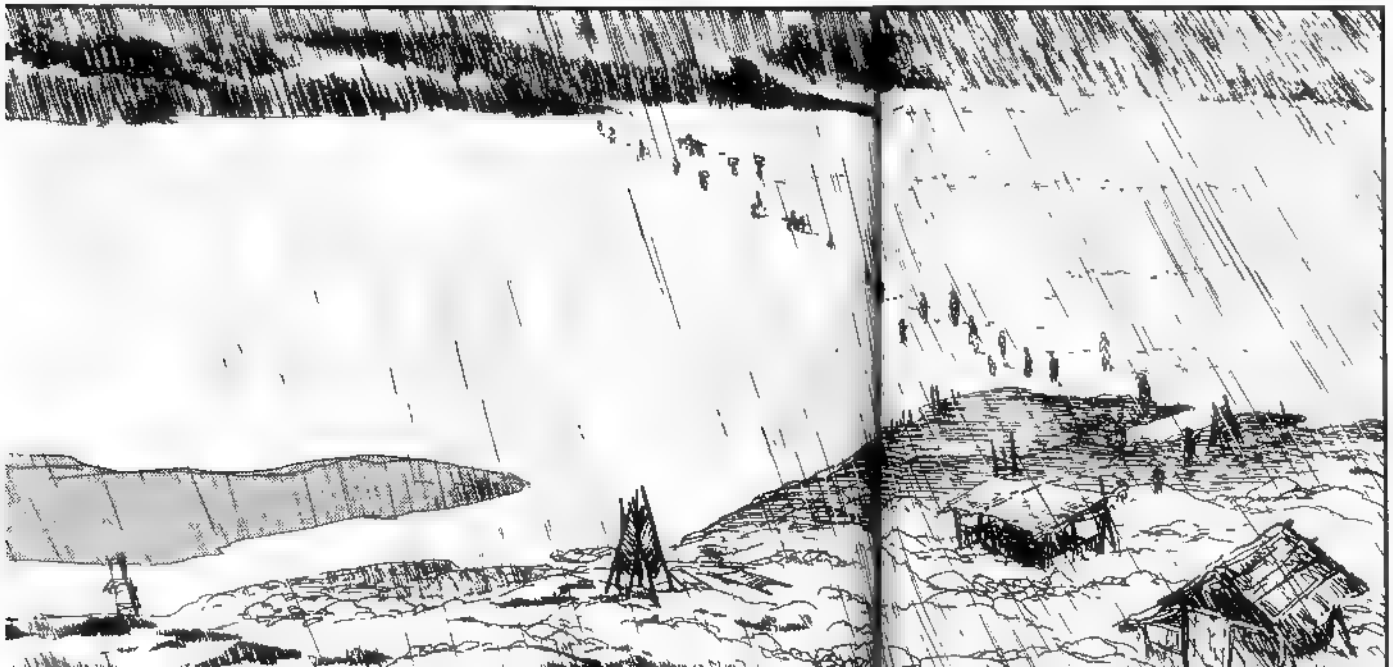
NORMALLY THE Ōi RIVER RUNS TWO *SHAKU* FIVE *SUN* DEEP. WHEN THE WATERS ROSE ANOTHER *SHAKU*, IT WAS *CLOSED* TO HORSES. UP TO TWO *SHAKU* OVER NORMAL, *CLOSED* TO PEOPLE. OVER TWO *SHAKU* HIGH, WITH THE RIVER RUNNING FOUR *SHAKU* FIVE *SUN* DEEP AND MORE, THEY WOULD DECLARE THE RIVER ***CLOSED***.

BUT FOR THE ***GOJŌ-BAKO***, THE OFFICIAL LINE OF COMMUNICATION FOR THE SHŌGUNATE, THE RIVER WAS ***NEVER*** CLOSED.

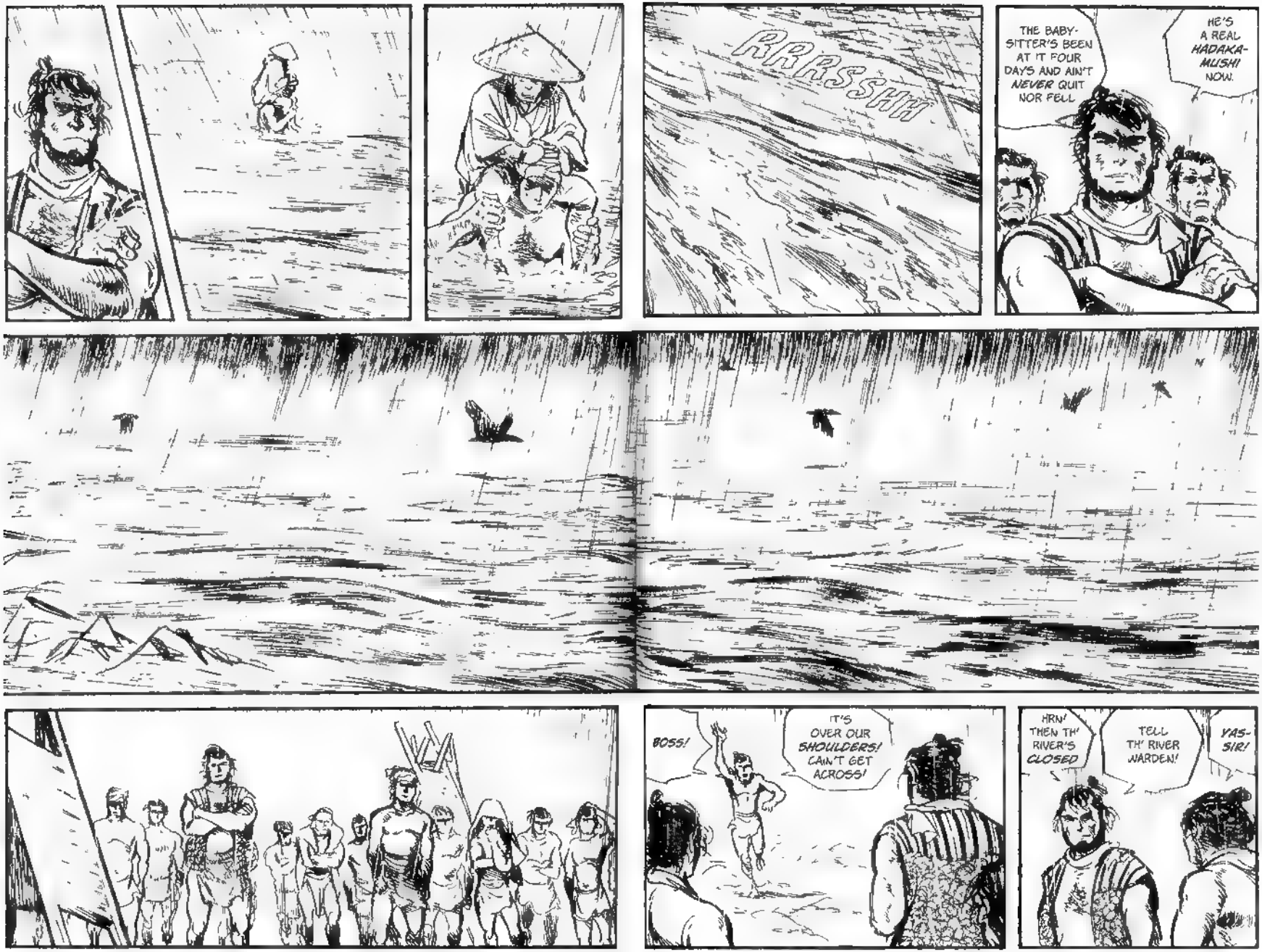
NO MATTER HOW DEEP THE FLOOD, TEAMS OF HAND-PICKED RIVER LABORERS TOOK THE ***GOJŌ-BAKO*** ACROSS.



KSSSHHH

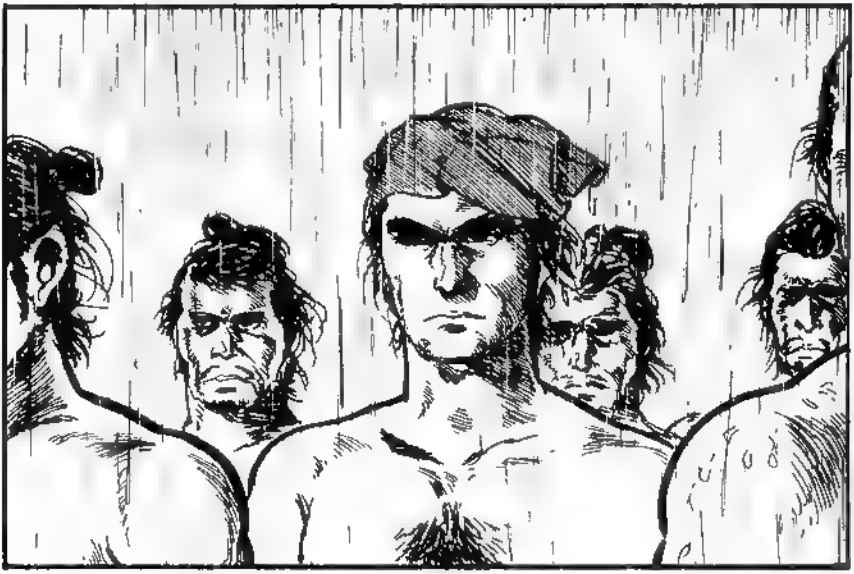


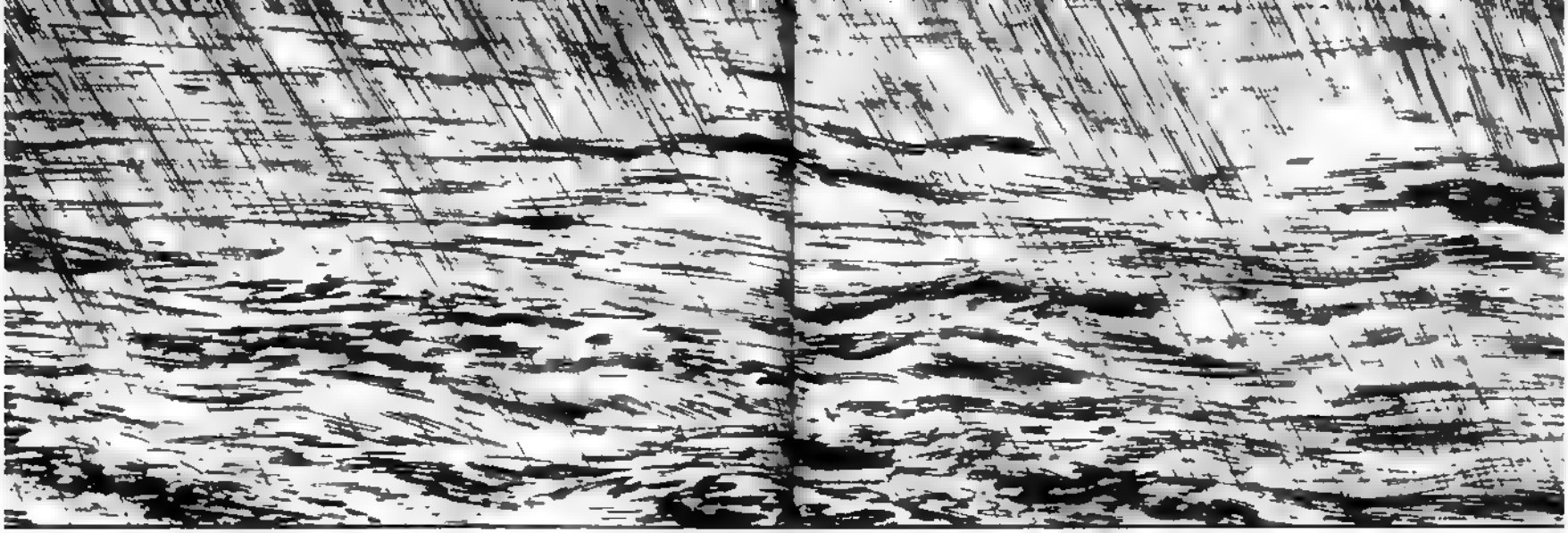
IF IT KEEPS ON LIKE THIS, WE'LL BE CHEST DEEP IN TWO DAYS.
SHOULDER DEEP IN THREE.

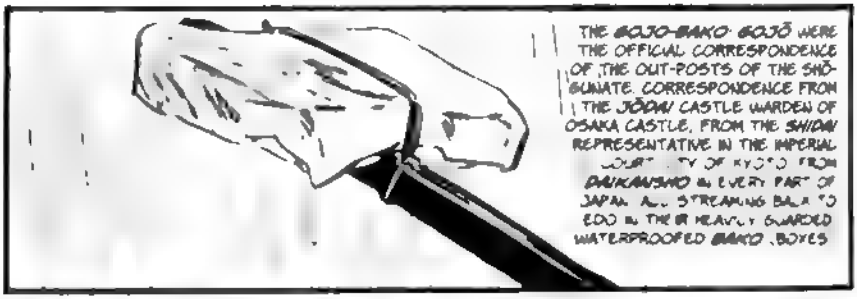

RRRSSHH
THE BABY-SITTER'S BEEN AT IT FOUR DAYS AND AIN'T NEVER QUIT NOR FELL
HE'S A REAL HADAKA-MUSHI NOW.
BOSS!
IT'S OVER OUR SHOULDERS! CAIN'T GET ACROSS!
HRN! THEN TH' RIVER'S CLOSED
TELL TH' RIVER WARDEN!
YAS-SIR!

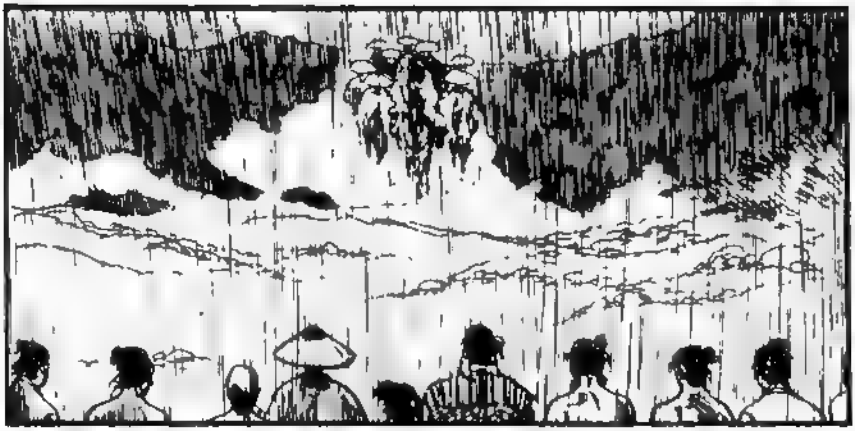
SO BE IT I'LL DECLARE IT CLOSED.

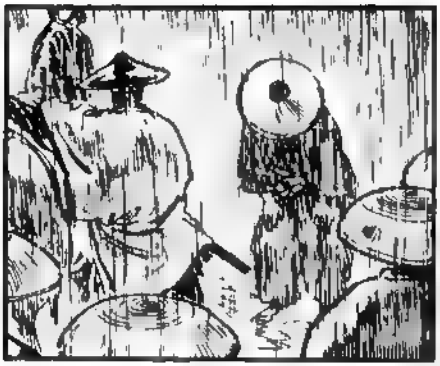
BUT WE HAVE A GOJÔ-BAKO COMING THROUGH AT THE CRACK OF DAWN, AND IT HAS TO GET ACROSS. SO PICK TWENTY GOOD MEN!
YES-SIR!






THE GOJO-BAKO GOJÔ WERE THE OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENCE OF THE OUT-POSTS OF THE SHÔGUNATE. CORRESPONDENCE FROM THE JÔDAI CASTLE WARDEN OF OSAKA CASTLE, FROM THE SHIDAI REPRESENTATIVE IN THE IMPERIAL COURT CITY OF KYOTO, FROM DAIKANSHO IN EVERY PART OF JAPAN ALL STREAMING BACK TO EDO IN THEIR HEAVILY GUARDED WATERPROOFED BAKO BOXES





THE FIRST PLATFORM WILL CARRY THE GOJÔ-BAKO
YES, SIR!

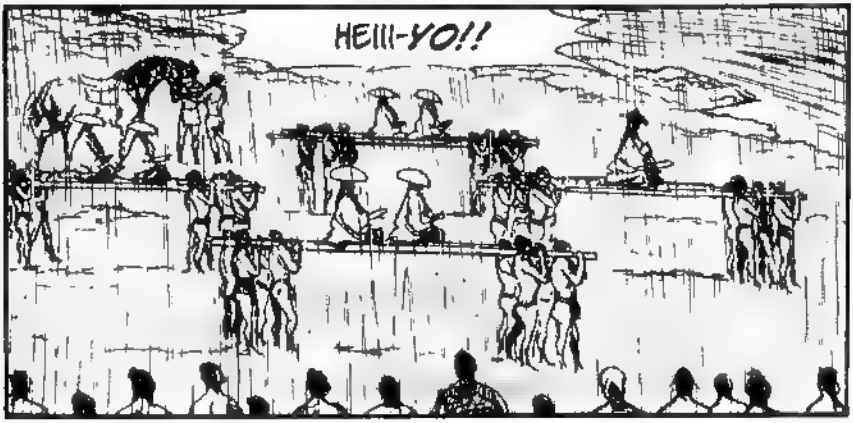
ARE YOU READY?!
SIR!

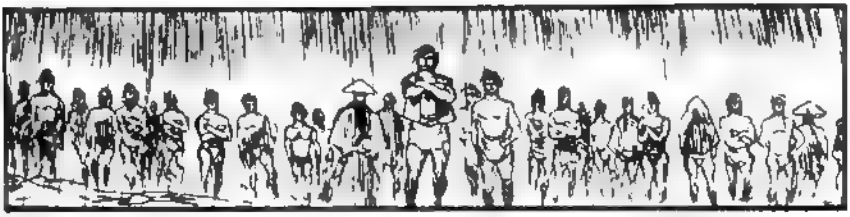
READY, BOYS?!
HE!!!-YO!!!

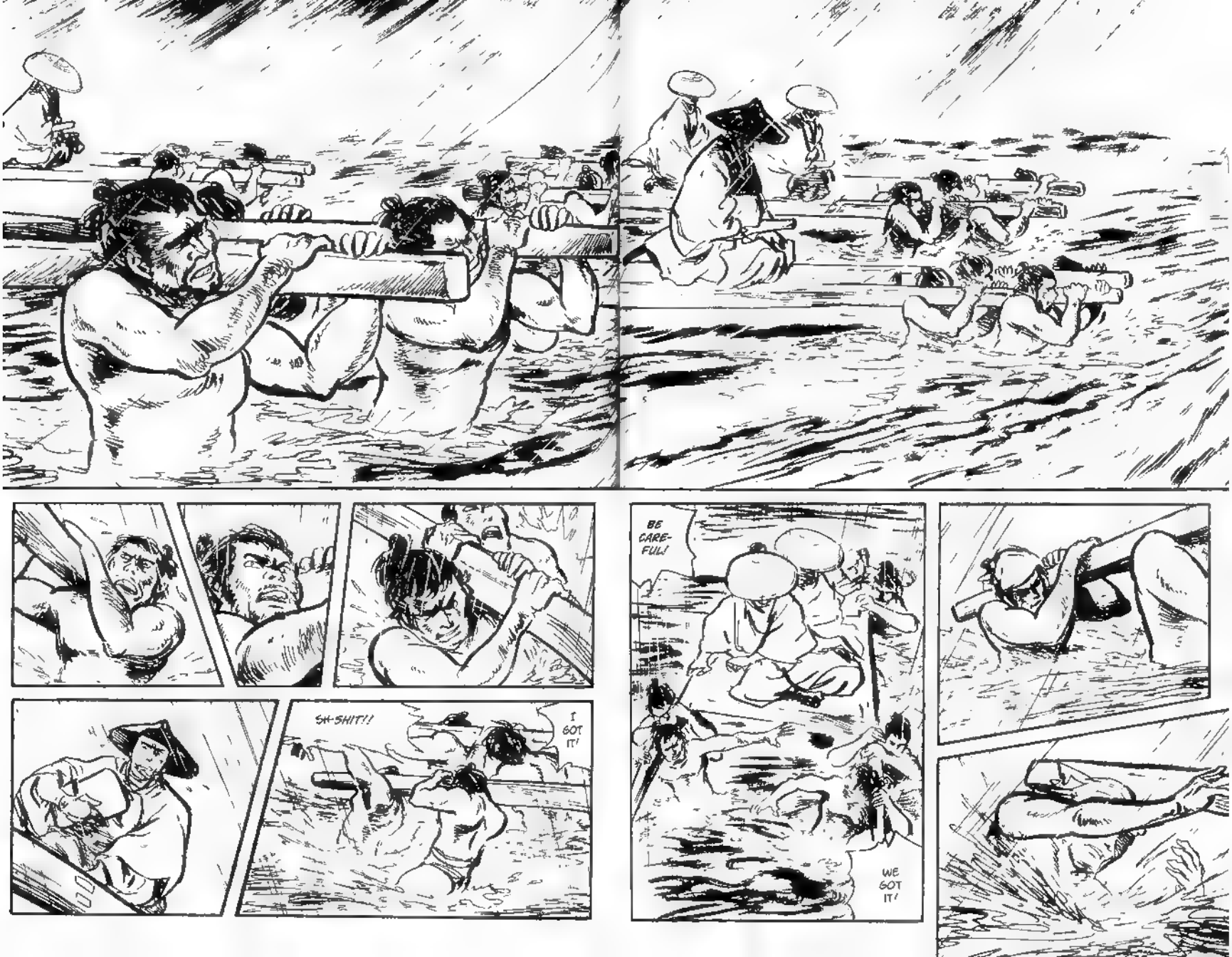
BABY-SITTER! YOU TAKE THE LEAD RENDA!!

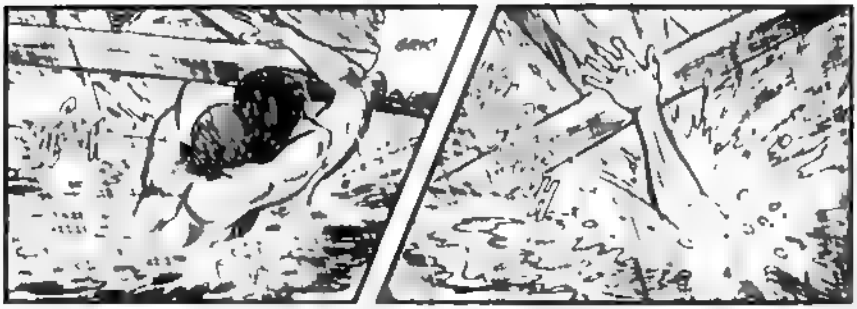
DO YER DUTY!
....
....

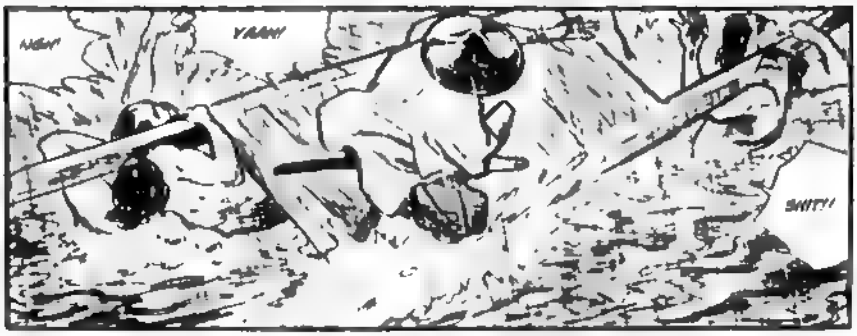
TAKE 'EM
ACROSS!!


HEIII-YO!!




SH-SHIT!!
I GOT IT!
BE CARE-FUL!
WE GOT IT!

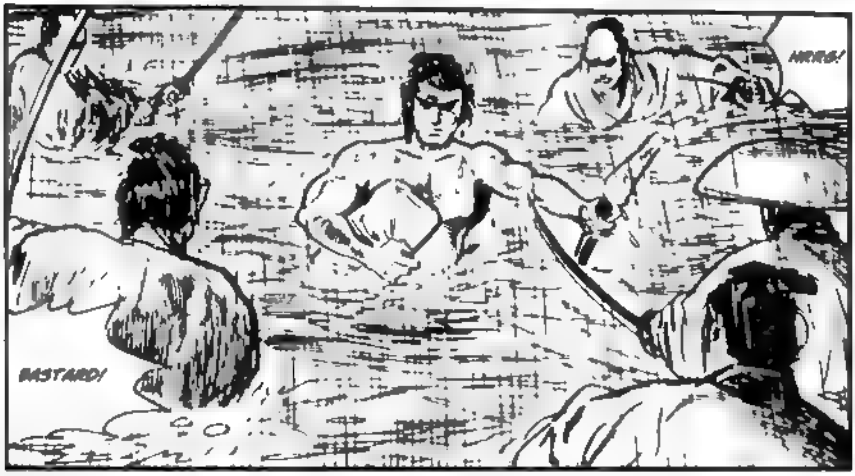

GRK!


NGH!
YRAH!
SHIT!!

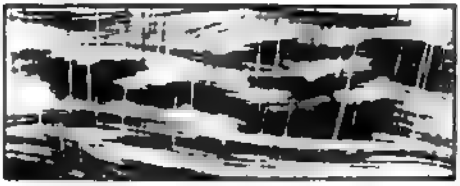
BLOOSH
AUUGHK!

HEY! WHA–?!
DAMN!
EKK!

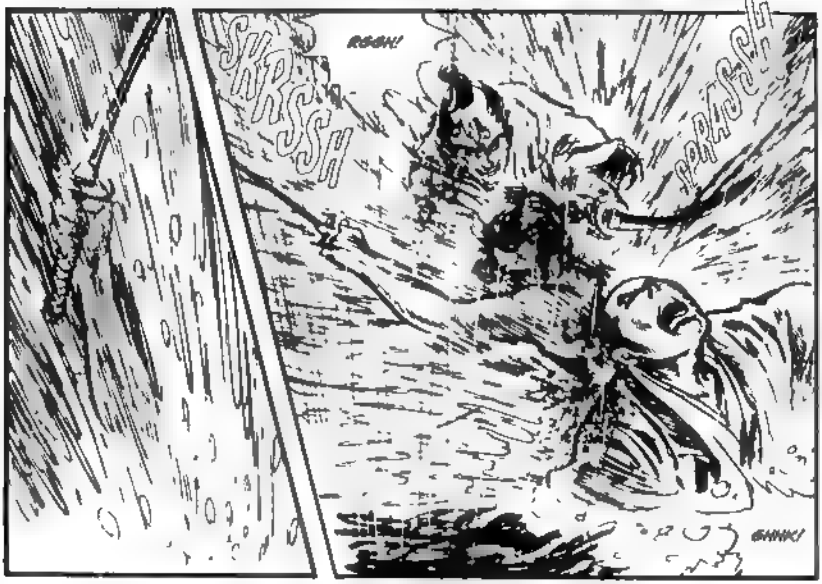
WH– WHO ARE YOU?!
HE'S GOT THE GOJŌ-BAKO!


HRRG!
BASTARD!

D-DAMN YOU G GIVE IT BACK!!



RYAAAA!


SKRSSH
RGGH!
SPRISH
GHHK!

COME BACK !!
DAMN YOU!

M-MY GOD!! WHAT THE—?!
IT'S A DISASTER! A DISASTER!

MM. JUST AS I THOUGHT.

VILLAIN! HALT!!
GET HIM!

SKASSH

SKSSH

WHOA!

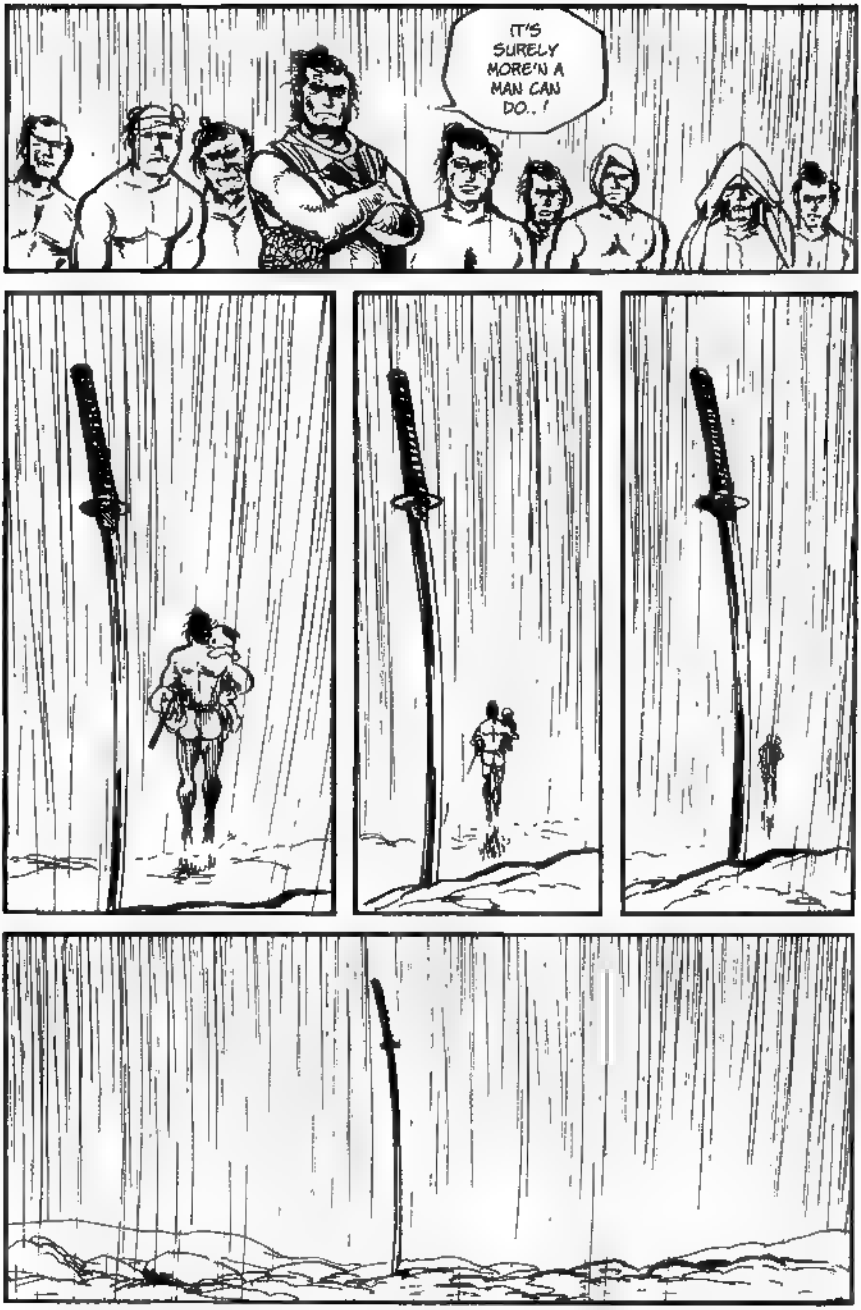
GUNK
PAPA!
SON OF A BITCH!
THE GOJÔ BAKO...!

LET HIM GO!

THERE GOES A REAL SAMURAI, BOYS! A REAL SAMURAI, WHEN THERE AIN'T NO MORE LIKE THAT LEFT IN THE WHOLE WORLD!
WE HADAKA-MUSHI CAN TELL THIS STORY FER GENERATIONS THAT THERE WAS STILL ONE SAMURAI LIKE 'IM LEFT

MAKIN' HISSELF ONE O' US. .CARRYING PEASANTS AND TOWN FOLK ON HIS BACK
ALL FOR HIS GOAL. .AND ALL WITH HIS KID AT HIS SIDE. DAMN. I DUNNO WHAT KIND'A QUEST YER ON. ..

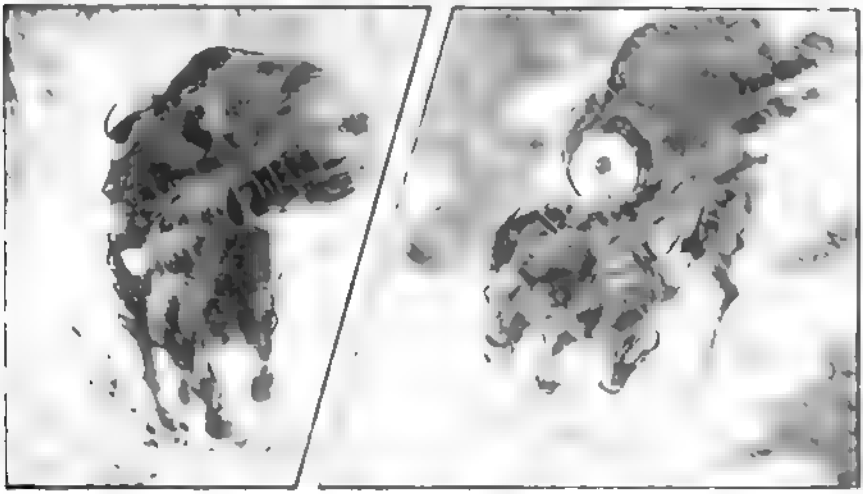
.BUT IT'S MORE'N A MAN CAN DO.

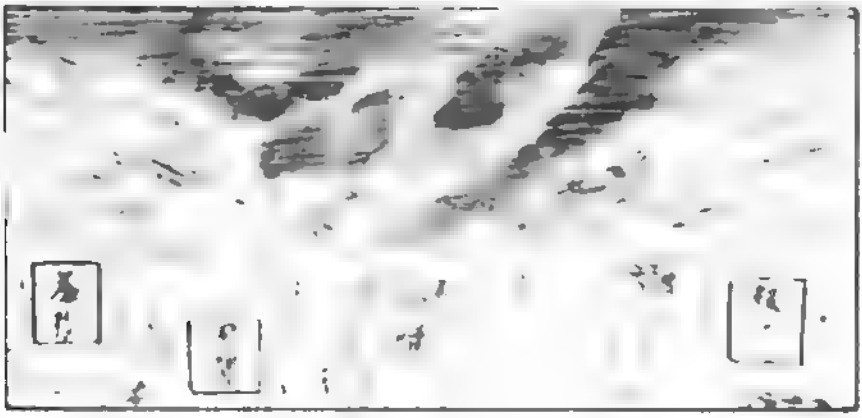

IT'S SURELY MORE'N A MAN CAN DO..!

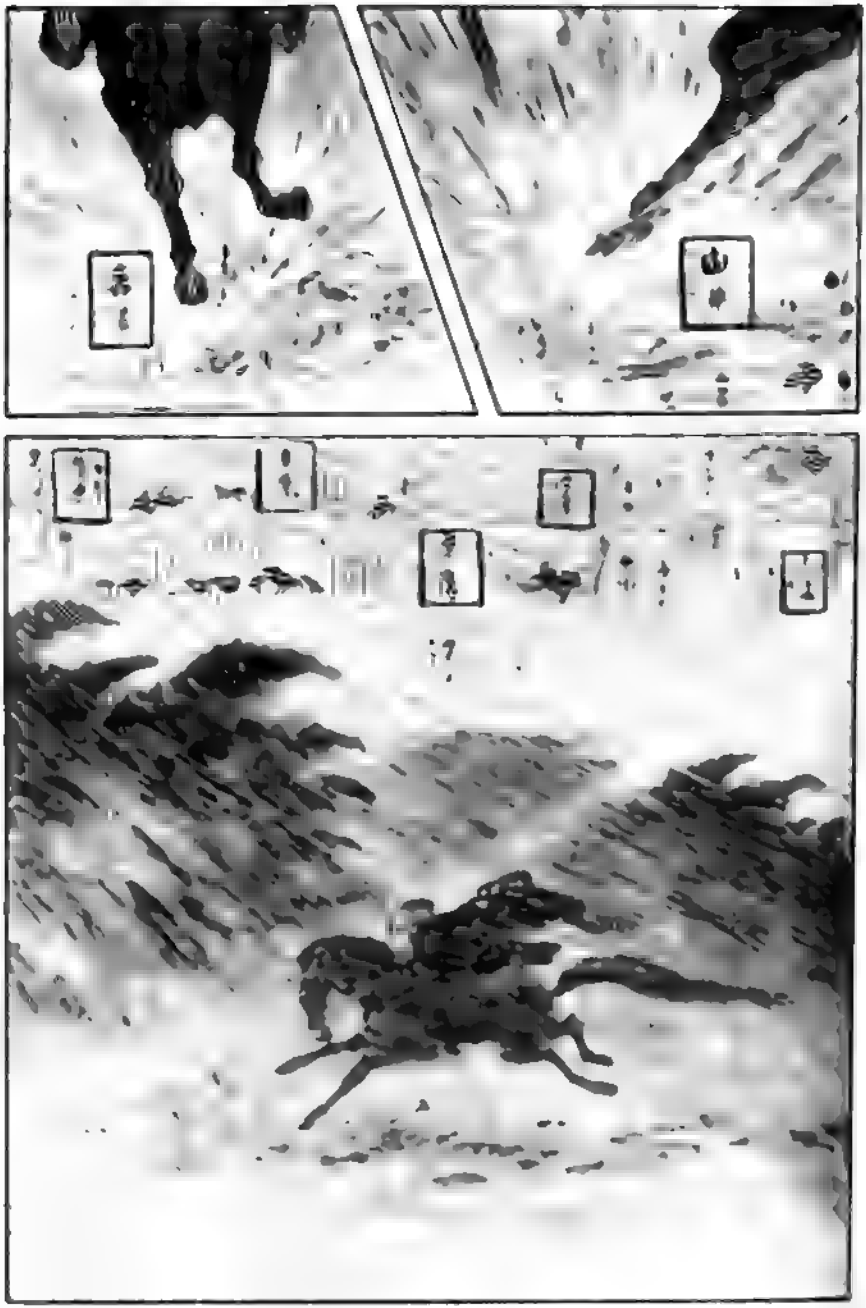
the forty-ninth

The Yagyū Letter: Prologue

ТНОККАТА
ТНОККАТА

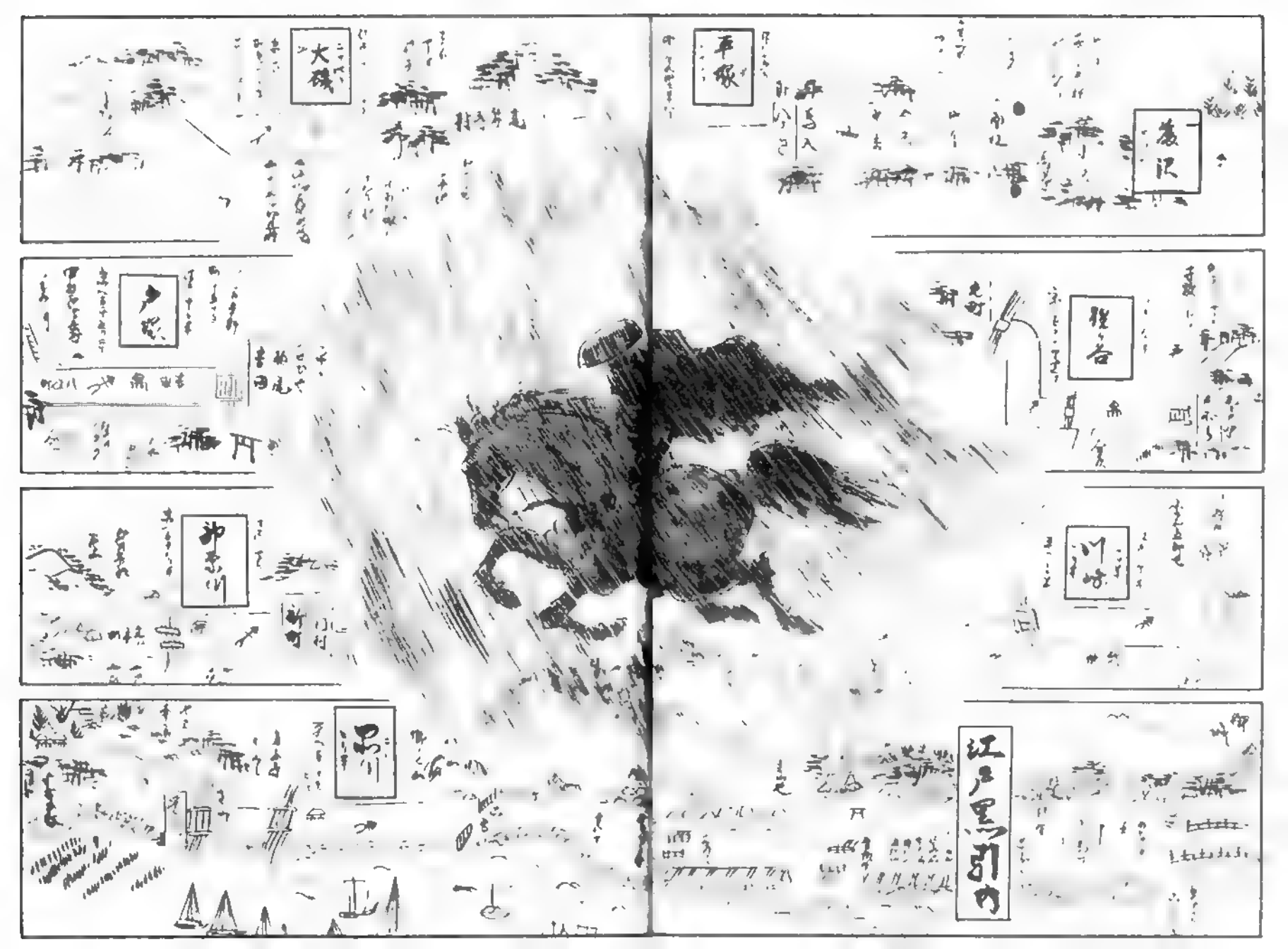






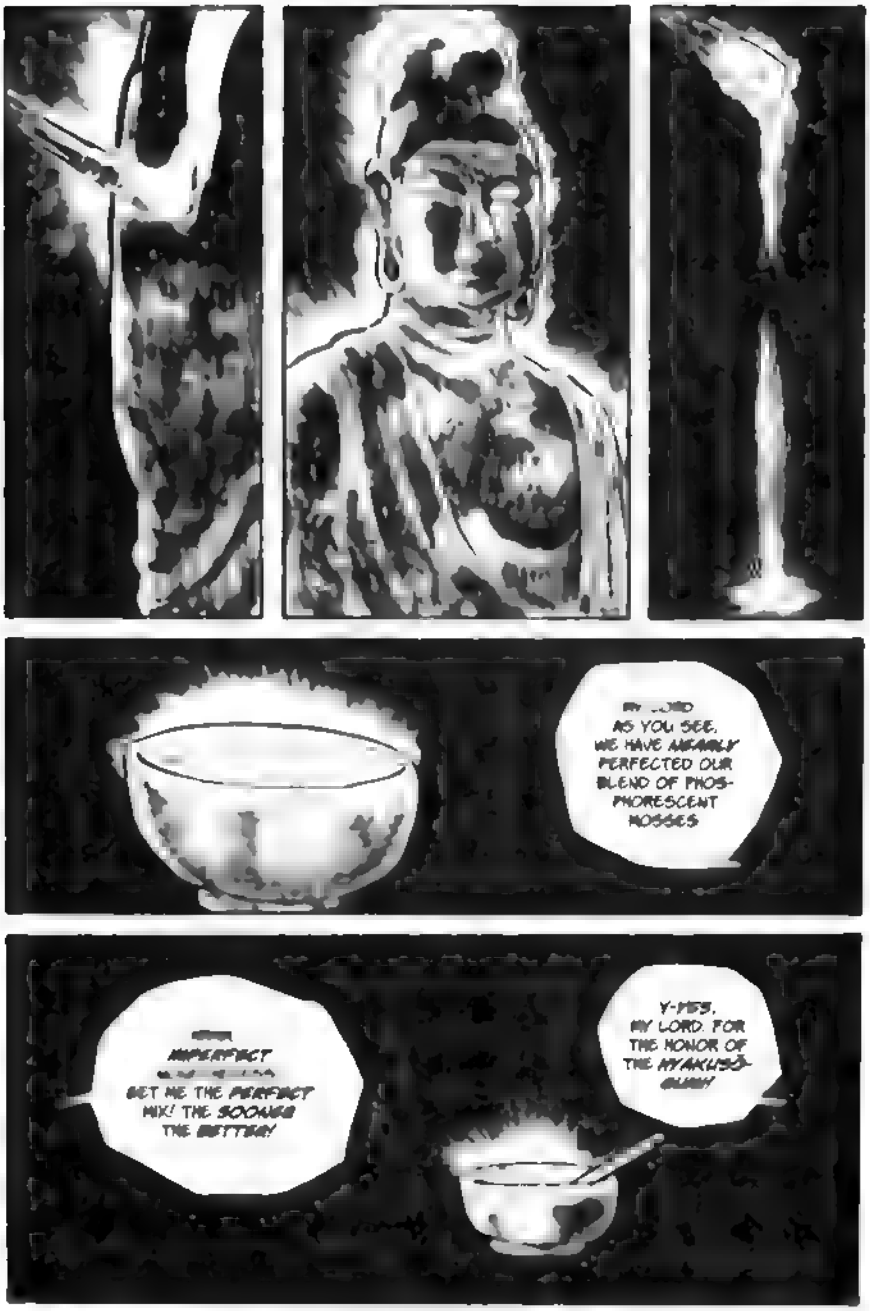
*HAKONE CHECKPOINT

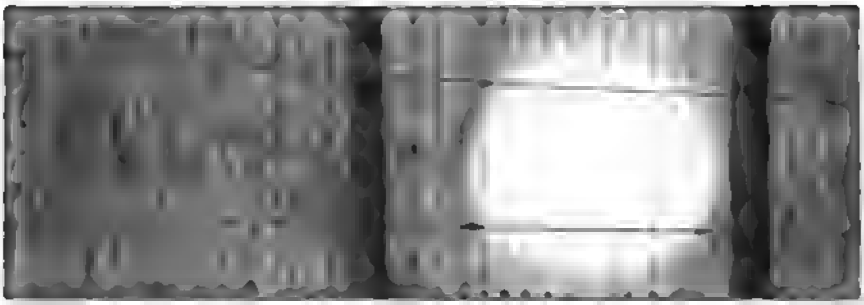
THOUGHTS

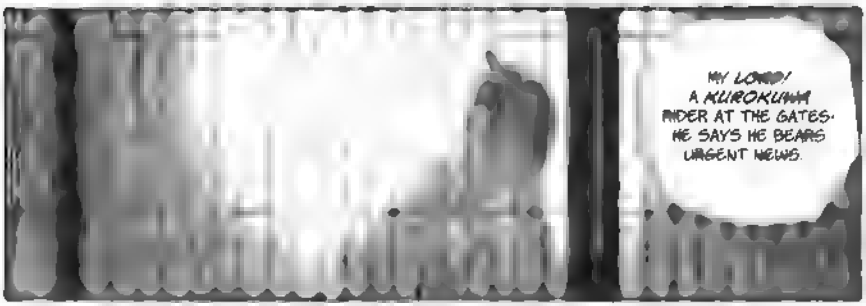

江戸黒引内
川崎
程ヶ谷
藤沢
平塚
大磯
戸塚
神奈川
品川

OPEN THE GATE!

WHAT?!


MY LORD
AS YOU SEE, WE HAVE NEARLY PERFECTED OUR BLEND OF PHOSPHORESCENT MOSSES
IMPERFECT
GET ME THE PERFECT MIX! THE SOONER THE BETTER!
Y-YES, MY LORD. FOR THE HONOR OF THE MYAKUSU CLAN!




MY LORD! A KUROKUMA RIDER AT THE GATES. HE SAYS HE BEARS URGENT NEWS.

WHAT?!

THIS IS TRUE?!
YES, MY LORD!

HE STOLE A GOJŌ-BAKO?!
MY LORD ŌGAMI ITTŌ IMPERSONATED A HADAKA-MUSHI, AND SEIZED THE BOX AT THE ŌI RIVER CROSSING

RRGAAH !!
DAMN YOU, ŌGAMI ITTŌ! IF YOU STOLE THAT BOX, YOU'VE SNIFFED OUT THE DEEPEST SECRET OF THE URA-YAGYŪ!

THERE'S NO TIME TO LOSE! WE NEED THE LETTER BACK! UNTIL NOW WE'VE HONORED OUR PLEDGE NEVER TO ATTACK YOU HEAD-ON! BUT DID YOU THINK THAT WAS THE LIMIT OF OUR POWER?!

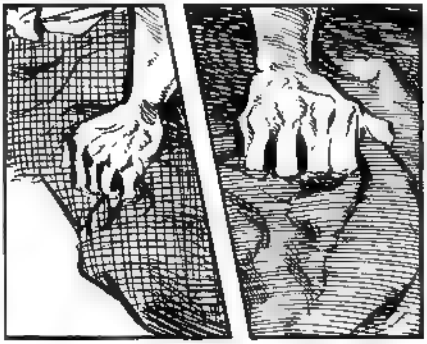
PLUNDER OUR SECRETS, WILL YOU? BAH! YOU HAVEN'T THE WITS TO FIGURE THEM OUT! TO YOU IT'S JUST ANOTHER GOJŌ LETTER, NOTHING MORE!

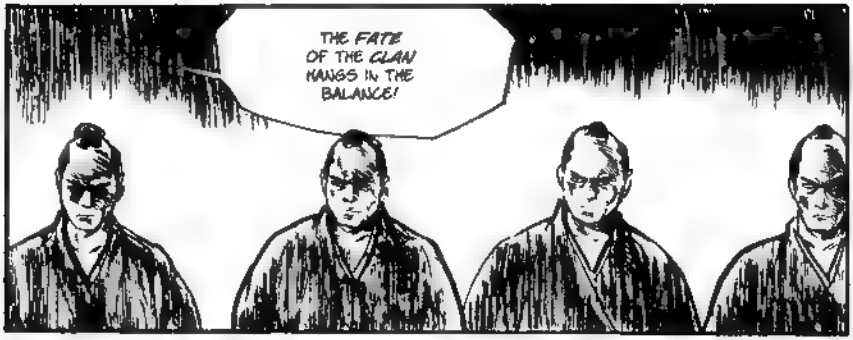
BUT BY *STEALING* IT, YOU'VE UNKNOWINGLY *CHALLENGED* THE *URA-YAGYŪ DIRECTLY!*

YOU'VE ENDED OUR *PACT* OF YOUR OWN *ACCORD! FOOL!* DON'T YOU SEE HOW *POWERLESS* YOU *ARE?!*

LISTEN *WELL!* THE TRUCE IS *OVER!* THE *URA-YAGYŪ* RISE IN *FORCE* TO *STRIKE DOWN* ŌGAMI ITTŌ!

WE MUST RETAKE THE *GOJŌ-BAKO!*





LONE WOLF AND CUB BOOK NINE: THE END
TO BE CONTINUED

GLOSSARY

ashigara
A lightly armed foot soldier, one of the lowest ranks of the samurai caste.

bu
A small coin, worth 1/4th of a *ryō*.

buke
A samurai household.

bushi
A samurai. A member of the warrior class.

bushidō
The way of the warrior.

daikansho
The office of the *daikan*, the primary local representative of the shōgunate in territories outside of Edo. The *daikan* and his staff collected taxes owed to Edo and oversaw public works, agriculture, and other projects administered by the central government.

daimyō
A feudal lord.

Edo
The capital of medieval Japan and the seat of the shōgunate. The site of modern-day Tokyo.

han
A feudal domain.

hanshi
Samurai in the service of a *han*.

honorifics
Japan is a class and status society, and proper forms of address are critical. Common markers of respect are the prefixes *o* and *go*, and a wide range of suffixes. Some of the suffixes you will encounter in *Lone Wolf and Cub*:
chan – for children, young women, and close friends
dono – archaic; used for higher-ranked or highly respected figures
sama – used for superiors
san – the most common, used among equals or near-equals
sensei – used for teachers, masters, respected entertainers, and politicians

jōdai
Castle warden. The ranking *han* official in charge of a *daimyō*'s castle when the *daimyō* was spending his obligatory years in Edo.

kōgi kaishakunin
The shōgun's own second, who performed executions ordered by the shōgun.

koku
A bale of rice. The traditional measure of a *han*'s wealth, a measure of its agricultural land and productivity.

meifumadō
The Buddhist Hell. The way of demons and damnation.

o-niwaban
A ninja. Literally, "one in the garden." Ninja had their heyday in the time of

warring states before the rise of the Tokugawa clan. Originally mercenaries serving different warlords, by the Edo period they were in the service of the central government. The most famous were the ninja of Iga and Kaga, north of Kyoto. The Kurokuwa that appear in *Lone Wolf and Cub* were officially the laborers and manual workers in Edo Castle. Whether they truly served as a secret spy corps is lost in history.

rendai
Platforms used for carrying travelers across rivers. Named for their resemblance to the *rendai* (lotus platform) altar in Buddhist temples.

rōjū
Senior councilors. The inner circle of councilors directly advising the shōgun. The *rōjū* were the ultimate advisory body to the Tokugawa shōgunate's national government.

rōnin
A masterless samurai. Literally, "one adrift on the waves." Members of the samurai caste who have lost their masters through the dissolution of *han*, expulsion for misbehavior, or other reasons. Prohibited from working as farmers or merchants under the strict Confucian caste system imposed by the Tokugawa shōgunate, many impoverished *rōnin* became "hired guns" for whom the code of the samurai was nothing but empty words.

ryū
Often translated as "school." The many variations of swordsmanship and other martial arts were passed down from generation to generation to the offspring of the originator of the technique or set of techniques, and to any *deshi* students that sought to learn from the master. The largest schools had their own *dōjō* training centers and scores of students. An effective swordsman had to study the different techniques of the various schools to know how to block them in combat. Many *ryū* also had a set of special, secret techniques that were only taught to school initiates.

sankin kōtai
The Tokugawa required that all *daimyō* spend every other year in Edo, with family members remaining behind when they returned to their *han*. This practice increased Edo's control over the *daimyō*, both political and fiscal, since the cost of maintaining two separate households and traveling to and from the capital placed a huge strain on *han* finances.

sengoku
Warring states. For two centuries between the old central rule in Kyoto and the rise of Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582), the first unifier of Japan, the country was in a state of anarchy, riven by constant civil war between rival warlords.

shaku
10 *sun*, approximately 30 centimeters.

shinzo
The young wife of another man.

sun
Approximately 3 centimeters.

yakuza
Japan's criminal syndicates. In the Edo period, *yakuza* were a common part of the landscape, running houses of gambling and prostitution. As long as they did not overstep their bounds, they were tolerated by the authorities, a tradition little changed in modern Japan.

KAZUO KOIKE

Though widely respected as a powerful writer of graphic fiction, Kazuo Koike has spent a lifetime reaching beyond the bounds of the comics medium. Aside from co-creating and writing the successful *Lone Wolf and Cub* and *Crying Freeman* manga, Koike has hosted television programs; founded a golf magazine; produced movies; written popular fiction, poetry, and screenplays; and mentored some of Japan's best manga talent.

Lone Wolf and Cub was first serialized in Japan in 1970 (under the title *Kozure Okami*) in *Manga Action* magazine and continued its hugely popular run for many years, being collected as the stories were published, and reprinted worldwide. Koike collected numerous awards for his work on the series throughout the next decade. Starting in 1972, Koike adapted the popular manga into a series of six films, the *Baby Cart Assassin* saga, garnering widespread commercial success and critical acclaim for his screenwriting.

This wasn't Koike's only foray into film and video. In 1996, *Crying Freeman*, the manga Koike created with artist Ryoichi Ikegami, was produced in Hollywood and released to commercial success in Europe and is currently awaiting release in America.

And to give something back to the medium that gave him so much, Koike started the *Gekiga Sonjuku*, a college course aimed at helping talented writers and artists — such as *Ranma 1/2* creator Rumiko Takahashi — break into the comics field.

The driving focus of Koike's narrative is character development, and his commitment to character is clear: "Comics are carried by characters. If a character is well created, the comic becomes a hit." Kazuo Koike's continued success in comics and literature has proven this philosophy true.

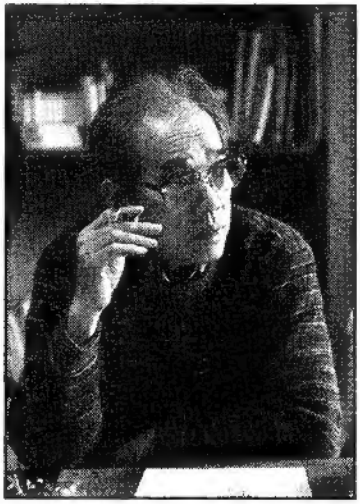
GOSEKI KOJIMA

Goseki Kojima was born on November 3, 1928, the very same day as the godfather of Japanese comics, Osamu Tezuka. While just out of junior high school, the self-taught Kojima began painting advertising posters for movie theaters to pay his bills.

In 1950, Kojima moved to Tokyo, where the postwar devastation had given rise to special manga forms for audiences too poor to buy the new manga magazines. Kojima created art for *kami-shibai*, or "paper-play" narrators, who would use manga story sheets to present narrated street plays. Kojima moved on to creating works for the *kashi-bon* market, bookstores that rented out books, magazines, and manga to mostly low-income readers. He soon became highly popular among *kashi-bon* readers.

In 1967, Kojima broke into the magazine market with his series *Dojinki*. As the manga magazine market grew and diversified, he turned out a steady stream of popular series.

In 1970, in collaboration with Kazuo Koike, Kojima began the work that would seal his reputation, *Kozure Okami* (*Lone Wolf and Cub*). Before long the story had become a gigantic hit, eventually spinning off a television series, six motion pictures, and even theme-song records. Koike and Kojima were soon dubbed the "golden duo" and produced success after success on their way to the pinnacle of the manga world.

When *Manga Japan* magazine was launched in 1994, Kojima was asked to serve as consultant, and he helped train the next generation of manga artists.

In his final years, Kojima turned to creating original graphic novels based on the movies of his favorite director, Akira Kurosawa. Kojima passed away on January 5, 2000 at the age of 71.